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PENHALA.

VOL. II.



P E N H A L A :

A WAYSIDE WIZARD.

BY

CLARA LEMORE,

AUTHOR OF

‘ A HARVEST OF WEEDS,’ ‘ A COVENANT WITH THE DEAD,’
‘ GWEN DALE’S ORDEAL,’ ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

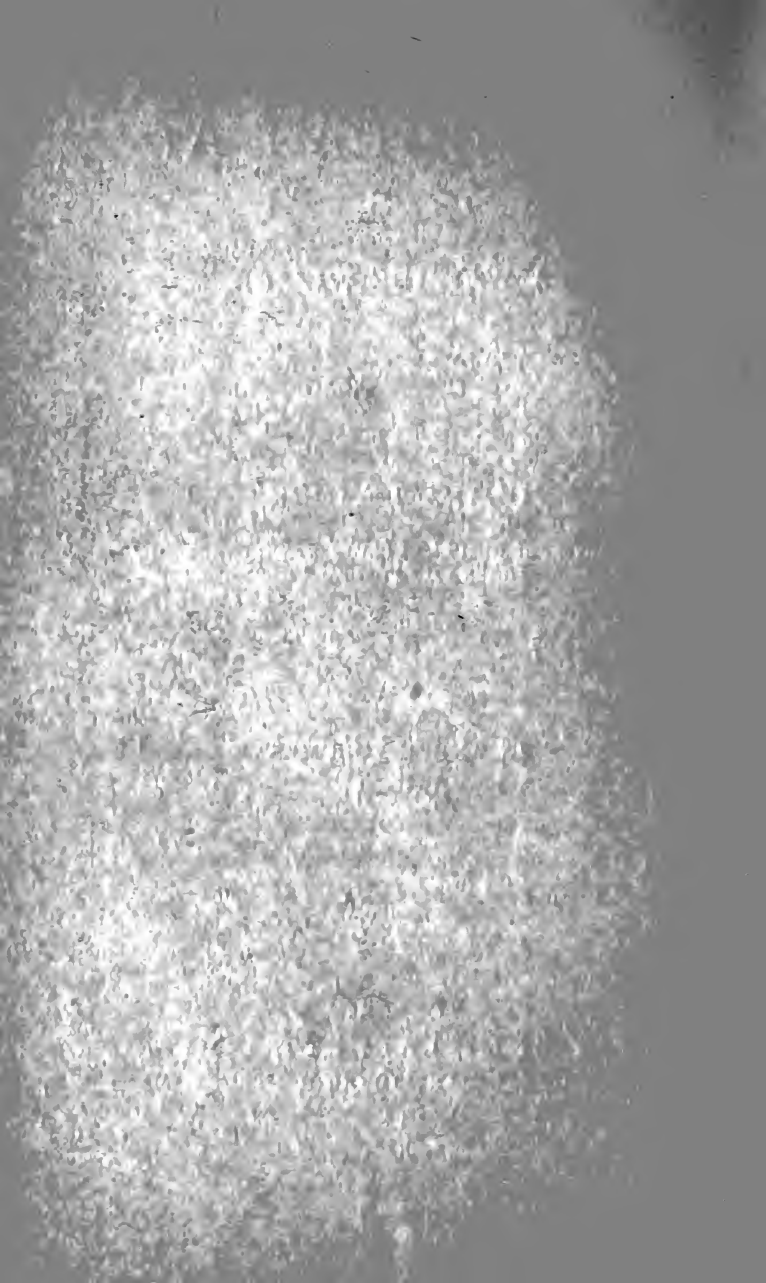
VOL. II.

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OF
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BOOK II.

(CONTINUED.)

PENHALA.

CHAPTER V.

A FATE NO HUMAN WILL CAN TURN ASIDE.

WHEN he left Miss Fentimore, the strongest desire in John's heart was never to see her again. The sorrows and trouble he had hitherto brought into the lives of those dear to him, had been caused by his miserable weakness, his lack of manhood. In this case at least he would not be weak. He knew what was the right thing to do, and he would go straight ahead and do it. Burlington would in all probability be still

lingering at the theatre, he would go back there at once, and ask the good-natured manager to leave him free to go his own way there and then.

Hurrying along Prince's Street again, he began to wonder at the discovery which had flashed upon him since he had walked that same road with Miss Fentimore, half-an-hour ago. She loved him! The wonder and the glory of it! Yes, he could not but glory in it, even while he flinched at the thought of the suffering he had brought into her life. She loved him! Could he ever again feel as he had felt—lost beyond all chance of redemption—knowing that a good, high-minded woman had held him for a spell in her heart of hearts? There was purification in the thought itself. The very recollection was elevating.

And this beautiful joy that had been offered to him he must push away from him for ever ; and, knowing and realising to the innermost fibre of his being that it must be so, he told himself that he was like some poor, thirst-stricken wayfarer in the desert, who, at his last gasp, was called upon to cast from him the precious cup of purest water, which would have saved him from the torments of a lingering death. All was dark before him again just now, and it looked darker even than it had ever looked before, because of the radiance he was leaving behind him. But, keenly conscious though he was that, by cutting himself adrift from his better angel, he was reducing to its minimum his own chance of ultimate redemption, he never for a moment admitted the possibility of an alternative. The one object he had in view just now

was not his own benefit, but hers, and there was no half-heartedness about his decision. He would in all probability go to the wall again, drop back, socially and morally, into the old slough of despond from which she had rescued him; but rather that a thousand times, than that suffering should come near to her because of him.

And yet, was she not already bound to suffer, because of this contemplated departure of his? Since the mischief was already done, would it not be more praiseworthy on his part to stay, and try to wipe out the bitter past by his goodness to her? Great God, how he loved her! Loving her so, how could it be—since she also loved him—but that he could make her happy? Such love as this of his was powerful

enough to overcome all obstacles, be they of Heaven's raising or Hell's !

Thus the devil's prompting for a spell, and then his newly-recovered manhood came to his aid, and lifted him high above the selfish sophism.

‘ Yes, she would suffer for a time, this sweet, pale, steadfast-eyed love of his, when she found he was gone from her for ever ; but the suffering of separation was a suffering she would recover from, and cast behind her. It was to save her from suffering of another sort that he would leave her, from suffering that would eat into her heart, and corrode her whole life, the suffering of a brain never at rest, of a mind for ever on the rack, for ever tormenting itself with fears for its loved one's safety. He knew himself what that anxi-

ous, unceasing watchfulness was like, else he might not have shrunk back so appalled from the thought of inflicting it on another—the quick pang of fear if a man but looked curiously at him in passing, the haunting dread of meeting some one from among the friends of his youth in his daily walks abroad, the ghastly terror of prophetic dreams, of tolling bells, and scaffold steps, and pinioned hands—should he lay the woman he loved, the woman who had been God's angel of mercy to him, under such a burden as this?

‘God forbid!’ he said aloud, and said it so emphatically, that one or two near him on the pavement overheard, and smiled carelessly at the handsome young man's absence of mind. ‘God forbid!’ he exclaimed again, and closed his teeth hard, and set back his shoulders, and turned

sharply into the passage leading to the stage-door, and betook himself to Burlington's room with a feeling upon him of a victory already well won.

And Burlington was still there, as John had thought he would be, and looked up with a friendly smile to greet his young tenor.

That is a strange contrariety in human nature which makes us always most willing to confer favours where they are least needed—strange, but incontrovertible. Burlington was no more free from this contrariety than the rest of his kind, and because he had chosen to jump to the conclusion that John Smith was a young man of good connections and independent means—a conclusion strengthened by his silence with regard to his own past—the genial manager would have gone farther out of

his way to oblige this especial member of his company than any other. But, even under these circumstances, his face fell when he heard that John wanted to throw up his engagement on the spot.

‘ Well, that’s a jolly rum start!’ he cried, throwing himself back in his chair, with his chin up and his hands thrust in his pockets. ‘ What’s this sudden whim for? When you left here an hour ago there was nothing of this kind in your head, I’ll swear! By Jupiter, I believe I’ve spotted the snake! It’s that cat, Morelli! Oh, don’t tell me,’ he went on, as John would have entered a feeble disclaimer, ‘ I know all about it. The vicious vixen has been talking to some of the others about your refusal to shave, in the same style as she talked to me, I suppose; and some of the silly twaddle has come back to you. Now

look here, Smith! I'll tell you what I'll do—I've taken a great fancy to you, and I don't want to part with you—that is to say, unless you are really anxious to break off all connection with me.'

'No,' said John, 'that was not my object at all.'

'Very well then, I have a plan to propose to you—Morelli is huffed with you about something—oh, don't bother to explain! You can't divide yourself and satisfy two women with a half a-piece any more than another man. The only real important point is, that the Italian will make things hot for you when you sing with her, and I have a plan to suggest which would square that difficulty exactly. How would it suit you to take alternate weeks with the two companies—a week here, when your parts lie with Miss Fentimore's, and a week with

the other company when the second tenor has to meet Morelli? I could easily arrange the operas so as to make them fit in.'

'Thank you!' said John, warmly. 'It's more than good of you to make such an offer, Burlington, and I'm more obliged than I can tell you. Will you go a step further, and let me permanently take up the second tenor's parts in the number two company?'

'Why—' said Burlington, opening his eyes and mouth very wide indeed—'why, I thought—' and then he remembered just in time that what he thought was perhaps best kept to himself, and hastened to change the subject. 'Of course you shall do as you wish about that; though, personally, I shall be sorry to lose the pleasure of your society. But I'm afraid I can't possibly do without you

to-night. I'll wire to the other fellow, Young, to come on to-morrow, and you will join them on Monday at Leeds, and take up his parts, but to-night you must sing here.'

John bowed to the inevitable and went away home, with a golden thread of comfort weaving itself in among the sombre web of his wretchedness. He had taken a decisive step along the road that makes for righteousness, and though his sorrow was nowise lessened it was chastened thereby.

Mary was not singing that night, and all the afternoon he was telling himself that he would have to go away without another glimpse of her. Speech with her he did not want—indeed he would have avoided it if the chance had offered—but he wanted to look once more on her face as

one looks at the face of the dead ; to photograph, as it were, every line and curve of her features upon his memory, before he went out from her presence for ever. For there was to be no half measures about this separation ; once he was away from her he would never willingly intrude himself into her presence again, never while he lived. With a curious inconsistency the thought of parting from her without a farewell glance at her sweet face, hurt him more at the moment than the contemplation of all the lonely years that were to follow afterwards. And so it was that, when at night he came on to the stage, and saw her in a private box with the manager's wife, his heart gave a great leap of gladness.

All the evening through, in the pauses of his part, he watched her furtively, and

when he was off the stage he still watched her from the prompt entrance ; and she was conscious of this unceasing observation. Once she even discovered him on the stage at the back of a crowd of chorus-singers, where he had no business to be, still watching her in that curiously steadfast fashion.

Burlington himself happened to be in the box at the moment, and, seeing Smith there, made a laughing observation to the effect that he was putting in a little extra work, in honour of his last night. And that was Mary's first intimation of his approaching departure.

She said nothing ; indeed, if her life had depended on instant speech she could not have spoken. For a few seconds the lights were transformed into a blinding sheet of flame, the music into a deafening

roar of indistinguishable sound. The truth smote on her understanding, and half-stunned it. She could only sit still, and pray that she might not betray herself to the pleasant, jovial people she was with.

John had found out her secret. And he was going to run away from her to save her from herself. Not to save *himself*—she knew that. He loved her—she knew that also—and greater proof of his love he could not have given than this—to voluntarily banish himself from her presence because he felt so keenly his own unworthiness. And she was helpless to stop this mistaken self-sacrifice.

The evening wore on to its end. She was under an engagement to sup with the Burlingtons that night; she would have excused herself if she could, but was un-

able to find any sufficient reason for her breach of faith.

When the curtain was down, she went round on to the stage with Mrs. Burlington to wait for her husband. At the end of a few minutes, the manager's wife grew impatient, and leaving Mary there, went off to see what was keeping her lord and master.

With the exception of a faint glimmer here and there, which did little more than make the darkness visible, the stage was wrapped in gloom, and through this shadowy dimness the stage-men were darting about with 'flats' and 'wings,' clearing the centre of the stage of all obstructions for the night. Presently Mary found herself directly in the road of a huge flat being shifted from one side of the stage to the other, and dashing hurriedly into

the dense shadow between two stacks of side wings in the grooves, she found herself literally in John Smith's arms. He had seen her there on his way from his dressing-room, and had stopped to take one more last look from the shelter of the friendly darkness.

Mary turned and found her eyes close to his.

'Oh, it is you!' she said, with a foolish little laugh. And then, without the faintest warning, with her face close to his, she broke into a passionate burst of sobbing, and gasped out, 'You are going away—without a word—to me, John—I can't bear it—take me with you—take me, for pity's sake.'

John's face went white and rigid, like the face of a corpse. He took her by the hand and steered her through the ob-

scurity, past the hall-keeper's den, out into the street.

‘Who told you?’ he asked then, in a dry, cracked voice. ‘I did not mean you to know. Who told you?’

But she could not answer for her sobs ; and he went on :

‘Do you know what you are doing when you say such a thing as that to me? You are tempting a poor wretch as man was never tempted before—you are asking me to enter a paradise where I have no right to be, and making me almost forget that what would be my heaven would be your hell. Mary, how could I bear to bring upon you the shame of my past?’

Mary was desperate now. She could not do worse than she had already done, that was some consolation.

‘But you would not hesitate to bring upon me the misery of a broken heart,’ she murmured, between her sobs.

John lifted a clenched hand above his head, and laughed aloud.

‘This is the first time in all my life that I have tried to do the right thing, simply because it *is* right; and see what comes of it.’

The sublime misery of his laugh shocked her, and frightened her into silence. They were some distance from the theatre now, and the streets were very silent and deserted. She could hear his quick breaths coming and going, just like one in the throes of a supreme agony. The thought urged her on. Why should he endure all this suffering, when she was able and willing to lessen it?

‘I must speak!’ she said, ‘whatever

comes of it, I must speak! How should I forgive myself by-and-by, if—if you grew reckless and unhappy again, and all because I had not the courage to speak out at the right moment. If to stay with me will be heaven to you, it will be heaven to me also. And, don't you see, it is because your heart was so set on doing right that this touch of happiness has come to you?' She was getting bolder now, her voice, coming straight from her swelling heart, was recovering some touch of its natural sweetness. 'The shame of your past will never come near me, John,—it is past, past and done with. And even if it were not—' she paused a moment, and held back her breath, like one who takes a headlong plunge into a shadowy abyss, and then went on in a whisper—'even if it were not done with, I would rather

share your sorrow and shame than be heedless and happy by myself.'

He had been walking with his head bent forward, and his eyes on the pavement. Now he threw back his shoulders and raised his face, so that the light from the lamp fell on it, and she saw how it was lined and drawn, by the vehemence of his feelings during those moments of inward struggle.

'So be it!' he said. 'There is a fate in these things that no effort of human will can turn aside. You know what this means to me! You don't need me to tell you that I love you, that I will try to make you happy, and all the rest of the feeble twaddle! I have no words that would give you the faintest idea of my feelings. I was going into the outer darkness, and you have led me back into the

sunshine again. No man living could ever rightly deserve this precious gift of your love, least of all I—a publican and a sinner of the worst type—but even I can do as much as the best among them—I can strive to deserve it—and if I fail—well, it shall not be through any wilful fault of my own.’

He laid a hand on either side of her face, and turned it up in the lamplight, and pressed his lips to hers, and looked into her eyes with a lingering pain even yet in his own.

‘Such sweetness and purity!’ he whispered. ‘Is it wonderful that my heart should fail me at the thought of linking it with my sinful defilement.’

There was a violent outcry when the two of them reached the Burlingtons’

hotel ; but the first glance at their faces quieted it.

‘The fish is boiled to a pulp and the birds are as cold as charity,’ said Burlington ; ‘but if you two have been occupied in burying the hatchet, I’ll admit that the supper has been sacrificed in a good cause, and eat it without a murmur. I knew there must have been a row when you came to me this afternoon in such a flaming hurry to take your departure, Johnny. I suppose you’re not quite so set as you were on giving us the “go by” altogether, are you ? Don’t you think my plan will be the better one, after all ? A week with us when Miss Fentimore and you sing together, and a week with the number two crowd when the second tenor sings with Morelli ?’

And John smiled and admitted that he thought it would.

And now that John's resistance was beaten down he fell straightway into the other extreme, and grew so impatient and unreasonable that, in self-defence, Mary was compelled to give in; and in less than a month from the date of the discussion concerning John Smith's beard, 'Mary Fentimore' on the bills was, in private life, transformed into 'Mrs. John Smith.'

Very much to the surprise of the rest of the company, Madame Morelli displayed the most marked amiability towards the young couple. 'Making a virtue of necessity,' Burlington declared, with a shrug of his shoulders and a downward pressure of the corners of his mouth. And Mrs.

Burlington was a little vexed with him for his want of charity.

‘It was natural,’ she said, ‘that Morelli should have taken it to heart when she found herself passed over for another; but that was no reason why she was to be held up to universal ridicule for the rest of her life. She would have been something more than mortal if she had been able to hide all sign of her vexation; and it only showed what a good-natured woman she was at heart, that she should bear no malice for what was passed, and hold out the hand of good-fellowship to the young couple.’

Burlington did not argue the point—he never argued with his wife; he was very fond of her, and he did not see the force of wasting his breath to no purpose—he just put his hands in his pocket, and

walked away whistling under his breath. And Mrs. Burlington's eyes flashed as she looked after him ; she knew quite well what the little performance meant, but she had recovered her temper by the time they met again, so there was no harm done.

And John and Mary were happy, with that still quiet happiness which hides its currents in its depths, far away below the surface, out of sight and hearing of all but itself. It seemed to Mary that the beautiful glow at her heart, during those early months of her marriage, was a thing too holy, too sacred to be talked about ; and if it seemed like that to her, how must it have seemed to him ?

CHAPTER VI.

A GHASTLY MISTAKE.

As a rule, Mr. Burlington's number one company appeared only in what are known, in managerial parlance, as 'number one towns', but now and again, under special circumstances, he made exceptions to this rule, and this visit to Doncaster was one of the exceptions. From a theatrical point of view Doncaster could scarcely be considered a first-class town, but Burlington had booked the theatre there for one of

the big race-weeks, and under these circumstances he had thought it worth his while to bring his number one company to sing in the horsey little town, and the speculation turned out thoroughly sound.

On the Friday evening the opera was the ever popular 'Carmen,' and half-an-hour before the doors were open there was something of a crowd gathered round the entrance.

The town was as full as it could hold with the usual *omnium gatherum* of the racing fraternity, and among the rest were John Smith's old chums of the burnt-cork persuasion.

As they passed the theatre on their way to their lodgings, after a day on the course, the youngest member of the troupe—Dandy Bennett, the one who had been the most to the front in the set against

John—had his attention attracted by the crowd round the door, and the next theatre bill he saw he stopped to find out what was drawing such an unusually large audience.

John Smith is not as a rule a very striking name on a bill, but Dandy Bennett, seeing it there among the cast of Bizet's opera, was struck by it in a most remarkable manner. The sight of the unromantic appellation, printed in clear type opposite the character of Don José, came as a revelation to him.

What more likely than that the 'Mar-kiss' had gone off on the tip-top professional lay? That would account for his long disappearance from all his old cribs. Bennett wondered he had not thought of it before.

A cove who could chant like a nightin-

gale, and patter like a real toff, would not have to go begging long for a berth among the opera people.

To the rest Bennett said nothing of the discovery he believed he had made, but as soon as he had got rid of his business attire he went off to spend the evening by himself, and he went straight to the gallery entrance of the Theatre Royal, and paid his shilling—double price during the opera season—and passed up to see what he should see.

It happened that to-night was one of John's 'extra journey' nights. To-morrow morning he was due in Newcastle for a rehearsal with the number two company. As soon as the curtain was down he had to rush to his dressing-room, change as quickly as possible, and hurry off to the railway-station to catch the Scotch express, passing

through Doncaster about a quarter before midnight.

And Mary went with him to see him off, as she always did. John laughed at her a little sometimes, and told her that, now they were getting such old married folks, it was time she dropped the sentimental custom. But she shook her head quietly, and took her own way in the matter. She hated these weekly separations. If Burlington had known what a real trouble they were to her, he would, in his marked partiality for the young couple, have altered his arrangements in such a way as to avoid these constant partings. But Mary did not belong to the tribe of grumblers, and, in any case, she would have found it impossible to enter a protest on this particular subject. Neither the love between herself and her husband, nor any-

thing pertaining to it, was a subject she could discuss openly with a third person. So, sooner than expose herself to the manager's good-natured banter, she endured the wretchedness of this half-and-half life, conscious of a presentiment that harm would come of it sooner or later, a presentiment which all John's tender badinage was powerless to overcome.

On this especial night John had some business to transact with the local manager before leaving, so the cab to take him to the station was brought to the front of the theatre instead of to the stage-door, to save him the journey round to the back of the house again. And thus it fell out that he left for Newcastle, without hearing or seeing anything of a man who was asking for him at the stage entrance.

Madame Morelli was passing at the time

the enquiry was made, and the man's cockney twang caught her attention, and led her to notice him more particularly.

Bennett had assumed his very best manner for the occasion, but he was a rowdy of the most pronounced type, and no effort of his own could disguise the fact for a moment. Morelli recognised the 'ikey' get-up and the Clerkenwell idiom in an instant, and was curious to know what this sort of person could want with 'Monseigneur, the husband of the Fentimore creature.'

When she got outside she loitered a little, as if undecided on some point, and, bringing her indecision to a sudden end, she turned sharply to her maid.

'I have left a letter on my dressing-table,' she said; 'go back at once and find it. I won't wait—I'll take a cab

home. The letter is most important—don't fail to bring it with you.'

The girl had scarcely left her side when she faced round to Bennett, slouching along the pavement just behind her.

'I think I heard you asking for Mr. Smith, just now?' she asked, amiably. 'Did the hall-keeper explain to you that he had gone on to Newcastle?'

'The cove at the door told me he warn't here,' said he, huffily. 'He didn't say nothin' else, and he might easy ha' said that more civil.'

'You wanted to see him?'

'I had some sich idea in my head.'

'It is unfortunate you should have missed him. Did he'—this was a sudden suspicion—'did he expect you here to-night?'

'Lor' lum-mi, no, mum! It was only a

sudden fancy on my part to have a bit of a jaw with an old pal. I never knowed he was here till I see'd him on the stage to-night, an' I'd been wanting a word or two with him for months past.'

'It is very unfortunate,' said madame again. 'No doubt he would have been glad to shake an old friend by the hand.'

This suggestion failing to draw any response, she tried again.

'I suppose you could not leave a message for him with me? He is a very great friend of mine—your message would be quite safe with me, and I would deliver it faithfully.'

He did not answer immediately, and, fancying she saw in his manner some inclination to accept her offer, she promptly hailed a passing cab.

'We can't talk comfortably on the pave-

ment,' she said. 'If you will come to my rooms, you shall say what you have to say without the fear of being overheard. Any friend of Mr. Smith's is a friend of mine. Get on the box—it is only two minutes' drive.'

'If I'd bin a dook you couldn't ha' treated me better!' said Bennett, a quarter of an hour later, as he rose from the table and passed the back of his hand across his mouth. 'I ain't had such a supper as that, nor yet such tippie neither, for many and many a night. And now I've got something to say to you.'

Morelli, in the easy-chair on the other side of the room—with her hat still on, and her large loose cloak still lying round her as it had fallen when she unfastened it,—experienced a little thrill of anticipation as she heard. During the last few minutes

she had been arriving slowly but surely at the conclusion that the sacrifice of her own specially prepared supper, and her unexampled condescension, had been so much wasted effort. Mr. Bennett had proved himself quite capable of holding his tongue when he did not want to speak. And even up to the very end of the interview, though his heart was warmed by his frequent applications to the brandy, he did not say a word more than he meant to say. He told Morelli neither more nor less than he wished her to know.

‘You’ve done more’n the right thing by me, mum; and I’ll do the right thing by you in turn. It seems to me—I don’t mean no liberty, so don’t you take it as sich—it seems to me that there’s summat more’n friendship between you and this old pal of mine, and if there ain’t yet, it

seems to me partickler likely that there may be some time or another. Very well; now what I ses to you is this— There mustn't, on no account whatever, be nothing of the sort. He's a shifty one, is John Smith, and you may take it from me that he ain't got no sorter right to keep company with any young woman whatever.'

Morelli went white to her lips. This was so much better, so infinitely better, than anything she had hoped for. And it was natural that Bennett, seeing her sudden pallor, should put it down to the wrong cause.

'Don't you take it to heart like that, mum,' he said; 'he ain't worth it. If you'd seen the other poor gal as he throwed over, as I see her a month ago, with her eyes all red and sore with crying. When

he left her, three or four years ago, to do the best she could for herself, he was mean enough to steal her marriage lines away from her; and then last summer, what does he do but get word sent to her that he is dead. Well, she'd made all her plans to go to Australia, just to get away from him, you know; but when she heard he was dead she changed her mind and didn't go; but comes up to London instead, and goes into service, and begins asking about, in her humble little way, if her dead husband hadn't left any belongings behind him. She hadn't much chance of finding things out, you see, and so it was a precious long time before I heard anything about it. At last somebody tells her that me and a John Smith had been in business together, and she comes along to ask me if it was her John Smith, and if he

hadn't left her marriage lines behind him. Well, it happened that I'd got a bundle of John Smith's papers in keeping for him, and these blessed marriage lines were among 'em. So when she tells me her name, and I sees as it's the same as in the lines, I up and tells her that her beautiful husband ain't no more dead than I am. And then there was a pretty kettle of fish, you bet. She was for taking the packet of papers there and then, but I couldn't see my way to that—he might hold me responsible for them, you see—so I told her I was pretty sure she could get another set of marriage lines by payin' for 'em, and advised her to go to a lawyer about it. The one that John Smith took away from her I've got here with the other papers. Would you like to see it?'

She was eager enough now ; her hand shook so much, when she took the paper from him, that she was obliged to lay it on the table to read it.

And even as she read it she began to believe that there was a mistake somewhere.

‘ John Smith, boiler-maker,’ she read ; and she found it all but impossible to believe that the John Smith she knew was, or ever had been, a boiler-maker. But whether it was really so or not mattered not an iota to her, so long as she could turn the mistake to her own purpose.

‘ You will leave this paper with me,’ she said, authoritatively. ‘ I will return it to Mr. Smith myself.’

Bennett looked at her shiftily and changed his foot.

‘ What proof have I,’ she went on, ‘ of

the truth of this accusation, if I have not the paper to show him?’

Still he did not speak, only looked furtively at her.

‘Pah!’ she cried, harshly. ‘I forgot! With you English it is always a matter of price. I will give you a pound for the piece of paper.’

‘I don’t say I’m above taking the money,’ said Bennett, slowly; ‘but there’s something else as well—I don’t know much about the law—perhaps he can come down on me for that paper, perhaps he can’t. But if you’ll give me the sov., and sign a bit of paper as well, saying as you’ve received the paper from me to pass on to the right owner, you shall have it and welcome. You’ve done the right thing by me to-night——’

She cut him short with a contemptuous

‘Pooh!’ and passed through into her bedroom to sign the required receipt.

Mary was at breakfast—one of her lonely breakfasts, how cordially she hated them—on the Saturday, when Morelli walked into her sitting-room unannounced, and suggested that the two of them should take advantage of this lovely day to have a few hours in the country.

‘Let us take a carriage and go for a long drive in the sweet air, and have our luncheon at some nice, wholesome little country inn, and come back fresh and well for your evening’s work,’ she said.

And Mary, wondering a little—for with all her recent friendliness Morelli had never before made such an advance as this towards real intimacy—accepted the suggestion gratefully, if not gladly. She

thought a drive would perhaps brace her up a little. Her health had not been of the very best this last month or two, but she was anxious that her indisposition should not lessen her professional value, at all events for some time to come.

So they went for their drive, and found their nice little country inn, and ordered their luncheon; and it was while they were waiting its appearance that Morelli turned round from strumming on the window-pane, and asked a question with such abruptness, that the very manner of it was enough to set Mary shaking.

‘Mrs. Smith, do you know much of your husband’s life before he joined Mr. Burlington’s company?’

Mary went red and then white, with a sudden sickening terror. Had this woman heard of the accusation hanging over John?

‘The saints defend us!’ cried Morelli, genuinely astonished at the effect of her words. ‘It can’t be that you know already, and married him knowing it? No, I’ll never believe that you, a woman who had such severe notions of right and wrong, could so have committed herself.’

‘I don’t understand,’ murmured Mary, trying to soften her stiffened lips. ‘Will you say what you mean?’

‘Well, I mean this!’ retorted the other, taking a paper from her pocket, and spreading it out on the table at Mary’s elbow. ‘John Smith was already a married man when he came into the company, and his wife is still living—or was living a month ago, for I was talking to a person last night who had an interview with her no further back. You don’t believe me?’

Mary had not spoken, it was only by the incredulous horror of her gaze that she challenged the assertion.

‘I did not suppose you would accept my unsupported word on such a matter, so I took the trouble to get hold of something that would convince you. You know a certificate of marriage when you see one. Look here, and satisfy yourself.’

She moved her hand as she finished, and Mary leant her white face forward towards the paper, and then, with a queer little gurgle in her throat, her head sank yet more forward, till it touched the table and lay there.

‘Of course she has had a violent shock of some kind,’ was the first thing the doctor said when he saw her.

‘She heard some bad news this morn-

ing, yes,' answered Morelli, trying in vain to speak quietly; for the sight of Mary's marble white face on the couch cushion made her teeth chatter with fright. Had she killed her outright? she was asking herself over and over again.

'And are you the person who communicated this bad news to her?' asked the doctor again, in his driest, most professional tone.

He was saying to himself that there was something he did not like about the case, something outlandish and mysterious. Perhaps Morelli's exaggerated fright was chiefly responsible for this impression.

'Whatever the trouble was, you should have broken it more gently, out of consideration for her condition.'

'Her condition?' repeated Morelli, blankly; and then she clasped her hands

across her mouth to stifle her shriek of enlightenment. 'Sanctissima Maria!' she moaned, 'I did not know! as I hope for heaven I did not know.'

The medical man said nothing, only shrugged his shoulders in a way which implied his inability to understand the denseness of some people, and resumed his efforts to restore animation to the patient.

But a long time passed by before he met with any sign of success, so long, that Morelli had given up all hope, and was already calling herself a murderess when Mary opened her eyes, and looked round her in feeble wonder. But it was a mere glimmer of consciousness; before she could recognise Morelli she was off again in another swoon, which lasted almost as long as the first.

‘There is no question but that she is in a very serious condition,’ said the doctor. ‘If her family are anywhere within reach, they should be summoned at once. I should advise you to set about it without delay, madam.’

But this was what Morelli could not bring herself to do. The thought of facing John Smith’s anger and his passionate reproaches was more than she could contemplate calmly. If this poor, feeble creature was really going to die—she began to tremble again at the possibility—what was the good of dragging the wretched man away from his professional duties, just to listen to a few incoherent words, to snatch a kiss or two from pale, unresponsive lips? No, it would be quite as well for him not to come till all was over, quite as well; and for herself it would

be a great deal better. How would it benefit anybody for him to know that it was the news of his previous marriage, imparted by her, that had killed his wife? No, on all accounts it was better he should know nothing till all was over.

‘She has no friends anywhere near,’ Morelli answered the doctor, and, as he heard, he liked the aspect of the case less and less. ‘I will undertake the entire responsibility of not communicating with them, for the present at all events.’

He did not urge the matter; he had spoken as plainly as he could, the rest was in other people’s hands.

Towards the end of the afternoon Morelli bespoke the services of one of the landlady’s daughters, to sit with the patient and follow out the doctor’s few simple directions, and returned to Don-

caster by rail—the carriage had been dismissed hours ago—with a promise to be back in a couple of hours.

When she went to take her last look at Mary before starting, she was lying so like a dead thing that it seemed to her that the end must be already close at hand.

She was shocked and horrified; more, perhaps, because she knew so exactly what people would say about her share in the affair, than because of any pity for those two people, who had dared to be so happy with one another at her expense. When Burlington knew precisely how things had happened, he would turn on her like a tiger, and call her a murderess to her face. And the rest of the company too—these Smiths had always been more liked than she was—how would they all behave to her when they knew that Mrs.

Smith's death was directly due to her officious interference, in a matter which was really no concern of hers?

Why, they would make her life insupportable to her when they knew . . . When they knew? . . . But need they ever know? . . . Suppose Mary died to-night, out there in that lonely little wayside inn? Why need the company ever know anything at all about her death? Why know, even, that she was dead at all? In all the wide world she, Nita Morelli, was the only person who knew where Miss Fentimore, Mr. Burlington's favourite young *prima donna*, was at the present moment. If Mary died, and she chose to hold her tongue, how was anyone to know that the Mrs. Smith who died so suddenly at the 'Maypole Inn,' at Hirst-Moss, was Mr. Burlington's missing *prima*

donna? And, by the saints above! there was another inducement to hold her tongue—stronger than all the rest put together, stronger even than her desire to avoid the universal execration of her daily associates. By leaving John Smith in ignorance of his wife's fate, she would be revenged, ay, up to the hilt, for the slight he had put upon her. He might possibly think—oh, the flash of gratified spite that the notion brought to her!—he might even, in time, come to doubt his wife's honour, and what an unceasing torment the doubt would be! A revenge worth having of a certainty, a revenge that would go far to compensate her for all she had endured at his hands!

The thoughts followed so quick, one on the other, that by the time she stepped from the train at Doncaster station her

head was buzzing like the machinery in a mill. But she had got a clear grip of the one main idea—her *rôle* just now was ignorance; in the first outcry and hubbub over Miss Fentimore's disappearance she had merely to hold her tongue, or to say as little as was compatible with appearances.

She had been home some time, and was quietly sipping her tea, when there came such a ring at the door-bell as startled everyone in the house into instant attention. It was the call-boy from the theatre.

‘The overture was rung in, and Miss Fentimore was not in the house. Did madame know where she was?’ ‘But why?’ ‘Well, he had been already to Miss Fentimore's lodgings, and the landlady there had said that Miss Fentimore and madame had gone out driving together in

the morning, and so he thought perhaps—'
'Then he was a fool to think! Miss Fentimore had met a friend, before they had been out ten minutes, and she, madame herself, had had to satisfy herself with a lonely drive after all. She knew nothing of Miss Fentimore's movements since eleven o'clock this morning.'

The boy tore away again back to the theatre to report progress.

Of course, in a well-conducted company like Burlington's, the principal parts were all carefully under-studied; still there is always a certain amount of flutter involved in sending the under-study on at a moment's notice; and it was Saturday night, too, and Saturday night audiences, if they are the quickest to appreciate merit, are also the quickest to resent shortcomings, as all provincial managers know.

Burlington was in a fume the night through. He was not singing himself, but he never left the stage; sticking in the prompt entrance loyally, and following the under-study through her part, note by note, from the rise of the curtain to its fall.

And then, and not till then, he began to ask and wonder about Miss Fentimore. She had not returned to her lodgings, because they had promised to send word instantly on her arrival. What in the name of mystery had happened to her?

Madame Morelli, who had gone out into the country to stay with some friends till the next afternoon, had been down during the evening, to give him what few particulars she knew. But they did not amount to much.

‘In fact,’ he said to his wife, as they discussed the affair over their *tête-à-tête*

supper,—‘in fact, it seemed to me that she did not like talking about it at all. She either could not or would not tell me what this friend of Fentimore’s was like. Beyond the fact that he was well-dressed, and looked like a gentleman, she could tell me nothing whatever.’

Mrs. Burlington looked a little bit triumphant. Her partiality for Mary had never been so strong as her husband’s; she would possibly have had more real liking for the young soprano if she had been less attractive in herself.

‘I always told you that Morelli was a good-natured creature at heart,’ she said. ‘She knows something more of this affair than she likes to say; she doesn’t choose to be the first to blacken Miss Fentimore’s character.’

‘What damned nonsense!’ exclaimed

Burlington, throwing down his knife and fork and getting up from the table in a rage. 'Is there any living thing under God's sun so cruel as a jealous woman, I wonder? If Fentimore squinted, or had a hump on her back, you other ones would all be ready to take her part through thick and thin, and declare she was a saint till the end of the chapter. But the poor little beggar has the misfortune to be uncommonly pretty, and so you all hate her, and wouldn't give her the benefit of the doubt—no, not to save your own souls, you wouldn't. She'll turn up all right at the station to-morrow—see if she doesn't! And she'll be able to explain the whole affair without a hitch; and then I hope you'll have the grace to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself for your uncharitable conclusions.'

And, having relieved himself of some of the ferment caused by the evening's worry, the angry man went downstairs to smoke a cigar in the public smoke-room, leaving his wife too indignant even to cry. To be told by your own husband that you are jealous of another woman's good looks! The infamy of it!

It was a quarter to twelve when Morelli got back to the 'Maypole Inn.' She had had first to wait for the train, and then she had walked up from the station, being anxious as far as possible to avoid observation in her present comings and goings.

The house was already shut, but the landlady came running herself in answer to Morelli's knock.

'Oh, you will be so glad!' she cried, under her breath, her good honest face alight with pleasure. 'Mrs. Smith has

taken a turn, a great turn, and the doctor has every hope of pulling her through. Though indeed,' she added, with a touch of regret, 'he says she will never be up to much again until after the birth of her baby.'

Morelli went in and sat down without a word.

In what a position had she placed herself now! To-morrow morning Mary would send in to the Burlingtons to come out to her, and Morelli's lies would be exposed. She was desperate. She almost felt that if the opportunity were to present itself of putting the wretched young woman out of the way, she would be justified in taking it. Was not self-preservation the first law of nature? What to do for the best for herself? That was the question that was troubling her. And

after all it was Mary who smoothed the thorns out of her path.

She was alone with the patient the next time she awoke, and she was startled by the perfect lucidity of her opening words.

‘You have returned then? They told me you had promised to come back. I am glad. I want you to help me to write to my—to John, will you?’

‘Are you fit to do anything of that sort just now?’ asked Morelli.

‘Fit?’ echoed Mary, with a smile that would have reached even Morelli’s pity, if she had not been so impenetrably encased in her own selfish anxieties. ‘Fit? Does it matter whether I am fit or not? Does it matter whether I die or live? Perhaps it would be better if I were to die. What is there before me? And my poor little babe—what sort of a life will it be born to?’

‘If I had only known,’ said Morelli, ‘I would have been more careful. Why were you so secret about it? Does—*he* know?’

‘No. I want to tell him. The babe may die, you know—I hope it will—but I think, in case it lives, I think he ought to know. For me, I don’t want ever to see him again—I should be afraid of myself—I—I loved him very much. And indeed,’ she went on, with a new touch of energy showing itself in her manner, ‘you must not put all the blame on him for what has happened. It was more my doing than his. He did his best to get away from me, and I would not let him go. I see now why he tried so hard to shake me off—I did not understand then. I thought it was only his exaggerated humility.’

‘You will not be able to sing again for some time,’ said Morelli, presently, her head full of the difficulties Mary’s return to the company would bring on her.

‘Sing?’ she repeated, drearily. ‘I do not think I shall ever sing again. There is nothing in this world I would not rather do to earn my living. I want to cut myself off from the past as thoroughly as if I were dead. The old life would be so full of memories—I could not bear it. Besides, he might be there, and, willingly, I will never stand face to face with him again, till we meet in God’s presence. No, I cannot forgive him—not yet. It was cruel, oh, it was cruel, after all that was past. No, there is no chance of my ever returning among the people we knew together—he and I. I think I would kill myself rather.’

She lay quiet for a little while and then began again.

‘I have been thinking all the evening through, trying hard to get away from the hideous cruelty of his conduct. I can only see one possible way out; but that is possible, and so I have determined to give him the chance of it. The name, John Smith, is such a common one, it might possibly not be my John Smith, after all.’

‘You forget! I saw a man last night who knew them both—both the people whose names are on the certificate.’

‘Yes, I had forgotten that. Still, even so, I must give him a chance to clear himself of the foul cruelty of this charge—I must!’

‘Certainly you shall—you shall do what you like.’

‘ You will help me to write to him? I know just what I am going to say. And if he does not answer the letter in the way I ask, I shall know then that he has done me this cruel wrong.’

On Sunday, when Morelli got back to Doncaster, she found that Burlington had wired to Smith the news of his wife’s disappearance, and he had replied that he was on his way to them.

‘ It’s confoundedly awkward,’ said Burlington. ‘ Our train for Birmingham leaves before he can get here. I suppose I must wait to see him. And yet I don’t see what good I can do.’

And then Morelli justified Mrs. Burlington’s good opinion of her.

‘ Let me stay behind and see him,’ she said. ‘ I can’t say much to comfort him certainly ; but I was the last person who

saw his wife. I can tell him more than you could. Let me stay behind, and come on to Birmingham on Monday morning.'

And Burlington's prejudice was quite conquered at last, and he declared with great heartiness that it was 'damned good-natured of her—that it was!' and went on his way with his company to Birmingham, glad at heart, if the truth must be told, to have got out of a very unpleasant task.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECOND TENOR MAKES HIS EXIT.

WHEN Madame Morelli had seen the company safely *en route* for Birmingham, she went straight to the house where the Smiths had been lodging, to prepare the landlady for John's visit.

‘If I shall not inconvenience you,’ she said, ‘I should like to wait here for him. I promised Mr. Burlington I would see him, and tell him all I knew about his wife's disappearance.’

‘No,’ the landlady said, ‘it would not

inconvenience her at all for Madame to wait there. She was not using the room until to-morrow. But Madame would excuse her—it was her dinner-hour, and her man liked to have her at the table on Sunday, seeing it was the only day in the week he was home to his meals.'

Madame excused her right willingly, and she went off to the bosom of her family, leaving the handsome Italian enthroned among Mary's household gods.

The room was pretty with the tasteful trifles the young people had gathered round them since their marriage. They—Mary especially—had been in receipt of excellent salaries, and though Mary had insisted upon a weekly addition to their banking account, they had enjoyed their income too.

Madame went round the room, looking

at the artistic knick-knacks on brackets and tables.

After all, what a fool that white-faced, strait-laced English girl was! They suited each other, those two, and—the mischief was done past recall. Why should she go out of her way to break up her own life and the life of the man she professed to love? That was an English-woman's idea of love! To go and leave a man for a quibble of conscience. Pah! If it had been Nita Morelli instead of Mary Fentimore things would have been different. Yes, my faith, rather! There would have been a bad quarter-of-an-hour for John Smith when they met again, oh, a very bad quarter-of-an-hour indeed! and then she would have said—‘What is, must be. Am I the one to cut off my own nose to spite my face? No! Come, then, kiss,

my John, kiss, and be friends ; I love thee too well to cast thee into another woman's arms ! Only, see thou to it that thou dost not seek to take advantage of this forgiveness of mine. Sooner than that, it were better for thee that thou shouldst go now this minute, and slit thy throat after the gruesome English fashion—ay, a thousand times better !'

And then they would have been happy again—as happy, that is to say, as one can hope to be in this strange, incomprehensible hurly-burly of a world.

But Mary Fentimore—oh, la ! Her sense of propriety was shocked, and straightway to this fetich she offered up the sacrifice of two young lives ! Droll dispositions these Englishwomen !

She paused for a while by the writing-table in the window, turning the orna-

mental blotting-book in her hands this way and that. Then she took a sheet of note-paper from her pocket and unfolded it. It was written on the two inner pages only.

‘I am writing to you for two reasons, John,’ the writer began; ‘first to tell you something which I think I ought to have told you weeks ago, but was prevented by a foolish sentiment; or one which at least seems foolish to me now, when we are separated, most likely for ever. These few months we have lived so entirely for one another, that it seemed to me you could not help but resent this upspringing of a new interest in my life, the strongest, the most absorbing interest I have ever known. I have loved you, John—you cannot doubt it—and yet, now, I sometimes ask myself if I have ever before known the fullest

depths of my own heart,—that utterly selfless love which could count the sacrifice of everything which makes life pleasant as nothing, when the benefit of its object is the purpose in view.’ Here the first page ended, and Morelli, instead of going straight on to the top of the next, threw her eye back to the beginning and read that far down again.

Yes, left unfinished like that, it was really open to very grave misconception, very grave misconception indeed. She went on then with the second page:

‘Such a love has no shadow of self in it, no thought of recompense, no looking forward to hope of reward—the love of a mother for her child. Think what it has been for me, with this hope still fresh and new in my heart, to read the enclosed, and

to be told that you are the John Smith referred to, and that both parties to the contract are still alive. I don't say a word of reproach—if this is so, what words of mine could express my wrongs ; if it is not so, you deserve none. John, if you tell me this is a mistake, that you are not the person named, I will believe you against the world. I am not able to write more. Put an advertisement in the London *Standard* saying it is all a mistake, and I will still remain, ah, so gladly,

‘ Your own as ever,

‘ MARY.’

There came a glow into Morelli's eyes as she read, and her lips tightened themselves closer and closer on her teeth, giving her a curious resemblance to an animal of the cat tribe just on the spring.

When she got to the end, she drew in a quick breath, tore the sheet clean down the middle, slipped the first half into the blotting-book, the second half into the bosom of her dress, and turned away, with the air of one whose mind is thoroughly made up and has no intention of turning back.

She passed on from the writing-table to a handsome small square box on a side shelf, beautifully inlaid with many various woods. She opened it and read on the lid inside—‘*La Naissance de Nécromancie.*’ To be sure! She had heard of John Smith’s talent for table magic.

‘From May,’ was written on the wood, up in one corner of the lid. Morelli smiled sourly over the little token of affection. She—this girl with the temperament of a fish—could spend her guineas lavishly

enough to gratify the merest whim of her husband, but for a lover she could yield up nothing—not even the poorest shred of pride.

As the time for John's arrival drew near she took up her post in the bay window, and watched for him. She saw him before he saw her, and in that first glimpse of his face she knew the slight he had put on her love was thoroughly avenged. Afterwards, in her presence, he did not allow his mental anguish to show so plainly.

‘Mr. Burlington has gone on to Birmingham,’ she told him, as she opened the door to meet him. ‘I remained here to see you. You see it was necessary he should be there early in the morning, on business, and—he thought you would get more satisfaction out of an interview with me.’

I was the last member of the company who saw your wife, Mr. Smith.'

John turned from looking round the room—her very own room, impregnated with her presence, the little bowl of roses, of the kind she loved best, still on the piano—he had brought them home to her on Friday afternoon—her work-basket open on the small table near her chair, the curtains at the window draped as no hands but hers ever draped them, the very atmosphere burdened with the faint odour of dry lavender which always clung about her clothing—he turned from looking round the room, as if he had expected her to spring from some corner out upon him, and met Morelli's inquisitive glance.

'She has not returned yet then?' he asked.

'Sancta Maria!' said Morelli, under

her breath; 'she has not returned; no.'

'But she will,' he observed, positively. 'I know nothing yet, you know, Madame; nothing beyond the bare fact that she has been missing since mid-day yesterday; but nothing you may have to tell me will make any difference on that point—there is some ghastly error somewhere, but she will find it out and come back, sooner or later.'

Morelli's colour faded a little, but she did not lose her self-possession; and in the present state of his mind he was not likely to notice so small a thing as her touch of pallor.

'At all events hope is always left to us,' she answered him, 'we will hope you are right.'

He looked at her, and she met his look fully; and meeting that look, he waved a

hand as if he would wave away the impression she sought to convey. He still stood where he had paused upon entering the room, with a closed hand resting on the centre table, and his face, full of a grievous perplexity, turned towards the window.

‘Tell me all about it, please. No hints or suppositions, but just the facts, as short and simply as you can.’

And she told him—how she and his wife had started for a drive, how his wife had not wanted to go at first, but had allowed herself to be persuaded into it, ‘upon condition that they drove out of the town by one particular road,’ how, driving along this particular road, they had overtaken a gentleman who had raised his hat, how his wife had requested to be set down, and had gone back to speak to the gentle-

man, how she had returned at the end of five minutes and excused herself from continuing the drive, on the plea of having met a very old friend whom she had not seen for some time, how Madame had not thought it anything extraordinary, knowing Mrs. Smith's old home was near at hand, in York, how she had gone on for her drive, not reaching home till nearly seven, and how she had been startled shortly afterwards by the arrival of the call-boy, with the news that Miss Fentimore was missing.

And John listened without interrupting, with his troubled glance fixed always out of window on the house across the street, and his close-shut hand leaning a little more heavily on the table. He moved his eyes to her face when she had finished, but he said nothing, and she, feeling the

disturbing influence of that silent regard, began to speak again to cover her touch of nervousness.

‘Mrs. Burlington asked me what the man was like, but he was behind the carriage, you see, and I did not like—’

‘It does not matter,’ said John, abruptly; ‘not in the least. It makes no sort of difference what he was like, Madame. My poor girl hasn’t gone off and left me because the man she met yesterday morning was handsome, or fascinating, or rich, or anything else—the man himself had nothing to do with it—I’d as soon believe it of an angel from heaven as of Mary. There is a ghastly error somewhere, and my poor girl is the victim of it.’

To this Madame could say nothing. She lingered some little time, not because she had anything more to say, but because

she felt an invincible repugnance to leaving him as long as he remained in Doncaster. But when she found he did not mean to return to Newcastle that night—that in fact he did not mean to return to Burlington's company at all, unless he first found his wife, she was obliged to yield and take herself off. Of course she attempted to persuade him out of this mad sacrifice of his position, but she saw almost at once that her persuasions were only so much waste of breath.

‘No,’ he said, quietly, ‘nothing would induce him to return to the company, unless they returned together. His presence there might keep her away, and that was a possibility he could not face for a moment.’

So she went away and left him there, with his closed hand pressed tight down

on the table. He did not thank her for waiting to give him the interview ; he did not offer to shake hands with her ; and as she passed out of the room, and left him standing as still as death, with his eyes bent on the gaudy pattern of the tablecloth under his hand, the thought did flash into her mind for a moment that perhaps, after all, her vengeance had been a little heavy-handed ; that perhaps some day she might stand in need of a little mercy herself ; and that in that day her cruelty to these people might rise up against her, and stand as a barrier between her and the mercy she needed.

But, if the thought came to her, she did not allow it to influence her actions. And when all was said and done, she argued, was not the separation between these two foolish young people as much Mary Fen-

timore's own doing as hers? And in answering the question she tried not to remember that Mary, in making her share of the arrangements, had left one door of escape open, a door which she, Morelli, had been very careful to shut securely and double lock, before she went on her way and abandoned these two people to their fate.

John, left standing there with the scent of Mary's roses in his nostrils, with the signs of her recent presence all about him, could not, even yet, fully realise the extent of the disaster awaiting him; or, to be more exact, he was still struggling against the realisation, refusing to admit for a moment the justice of the suggestions which, against his will, would continually present themselves to his understanding for argument and decision.

Against one hypothesis, however, his mind stood firm—let the explanation of this unhappy mystery be what it might, there was no hint nor possibility of blame for Mary in it; this point was as clearly above all doubt as his own identity.

What her disappearance might really mean he had not as yet set himself to ask, because he was trying to make himself believe that it was only a waste of trouble. She would return, or send to him some explanation, in the course of the next few hours; why should he weary his brain in making guess explanations for himself? And yet his brain was already wearied past further effort with the futile occupation.

There was one way of accounting for the present extraordinary state of affairs, which never occurred to him without a

sudden awful sinking at his heart—what if she had been taken ill, or had met with some fearful accident? Well, he was a silly fool to plague himself with such a possibility as that. Was Mr. Burlington's beautiful, popular little *prima donna* the sort of person who could be run over by a passing van, or trip and sprain her ankle, without any notice of the misfortune reaching her people? No, the absence must be voluntary on her part, that seemed certain. And yet, would she absent herself voluntarily without giving Burlington notice of her intention—she who was so scrupulously exact in all matters of business? No, he felt sure she would not. Well, then, her absence was involuntary, and in that case why had not this old friend, for the pleasure of whose society she had given up the drive

with Morelli, why had *he* not communicated with Burlington?

Not weary his brain with making guesses, and asking unanswerable questions? His brain was mazed and sore with the never-ceasing strain of conjecture, and his heart was sore too, sore with an anguish which could not endure that the hurt should be touched, or even uncovered to view.

And so, when the landlady came in presently with a covered dish on a tray, and asked him to excuse the liberty she had taken in cutting him some dinner from her own joint, he was careful not to let her see what a serious view he took of his wife's absence. He even thanked her for her kind thought, and made some pretence of eating. But the food threatened to choke him when she began, with

the curious relish peculiar to people of her class, to give him her impression of affairs.

‘ Had he given a thought to the river? Mayhap Mrs. Smith had taken it into her head to stroll that way by herself, and the banks were anything but safe in parts. Or there was Sloman’s pool, out on the Wakefield road—a nasty place in the twilight, quite close to the road, and the fence in anything but a satisfactory condition.’

John pushed his chair away from the table with a muffled groan, and she saw too late that she had stopped his eating, and went away full of regrets and apologies.

In all his life had John ever lived such a long afternoon as that? Now pacing the room a few turns ; now stopping in the

window for a few minutes, with his heart in his throat every time a fresh skirt fluttered into view round the corner at the end of the street; now turning his back on the daylight to fight down the sensation of strangulation that climbed up, inch by inch, from his heart to the root of his tongue; now standing for long spells, mute and motionless, his thoughts thrown backward into the heaven-like peace and happiness of those past months, and flying back like a liberated spring, to the festering misery of the present, as often as some sound in the house below recalled him to his immediate surroundings.

But the afternoon passed at last, and the darkness came. He would not ring for lights—that woman might begin again her maddening suggestions, and he liked the darkness best. Like a dumb brute

that is hurt unto death, he shrank instinctively from the sight of his fellow-creatures; as if his hurt were a shame. A glimmer of light came in through the window from a street lamp some little way down, quite enough to enable him to steer clear of the furniture in his movements about the room; that was all he wanted, he could not have kept still to save his life.

In this dim light he could still see the tiny bowl of roses on the piano top, the open work-basket on the little table near the fireplace, the litter on the writing-table in the window; and now that he was in the dark, as he passed in his paces these little possessions of Mary's, he took to touching them, with a lingering tender pressure of his finger-tips, as if praying of the inanimate things some answering sign or token.

And all these hours, curiously enough—and yet perhaps it was not so curious in his state of mental congestion—he had never thought of taking a single definite step for the discovery of Mary's whereabouts. The thought came to him at last, filtering dully through the fog of his misery, that perhaps he ought to do something. What did people do when folks went missing?

There was the police! That would mean publicity, and publicity he would have avoided. And yet what else could he do?

Now that the thought had at last presented itself to him, he began to reproach himself for not having set about it before.

In his present state of mental and physical exhaustion to think coherently at all was very difficult to him. What was it he would have to do first? Write out a de-

scription of her personal appearance for the authorities to have printed? Yes, they could not start a search for a person until they knew what it was they were to search for.

He would want a light. He had matches in his pocket, and there were candles in the piano brackets. He would not have the lamp—if that woman knew what he was doing, she would form her own conclusions, would think he was acting on those ghastly suggestions of hers.

He fetched the blotter and the pen and ink from the writing-table, and set them on the centre table, at that side nearest the piano; then he lit the candles, and with some feeling that there was a touch of comfort in their immediate neighbourhood, he set the bowl of roses down next to the blotter, and pulled up a chair and turned

back the cover, and then—kind God of heaven, she had left some word behind her after all!

Just in that first moment he did not wait to read it, he caught the half sheet of paper up to his cold, trembling lips, and showered his kisses of passionate gratitude down on her dear writing. Thank God, oh, thank God, she, at least, had not left him to face this misery without some touch of hope!

Reverently, as a *devoté* might handle some relic of a martyred saint—for had this woman not been his saint, his good angel, his saviour?—he straightened out the half sheet of paper and bent his glance upon it. But no exclamation came from him as he read, neither of joy, relief, astonishment, despair, nor any other emotion whatever. And when he reached the foot

of the page, and reversing the paper, found nothing on the other side, and lifted his face again, there was nothing on it but a blank, wondering stare of non-comprehension.

He was tired—that was it—these long hours of mental torment had fagged his brain, so that it was no longer capable of receiving ideas and passing them on to his understanding. Pressing his throbbing temples close between his two palms, he turned his glance again to the paper, and forced his failing energies to the comprehension of its contents.

This time, before he reached the foot of the page, he rose up with a muffled cry, and stopping the cry half way through, stood holding his breath, as one who suddenly faces a deadly peril. Then his breath came again with a quiver and a rush that

shook him, so that he steadied himself against the edge of the table.

‘No,’ he panted, in the smallest of whispers, as if fearful of being overheard, ‘not that! It is not that! I say It Is Not!’ Emphatic to ferocity the words were, for all their quietness. ‘And you were on the verge of thinking it—you coward! you cur! you brute beast! This angel in woman’s form comes down from heaven, and soils the pure hem of her garment in stooping to pick you out of your pit of defilement, and sets you up at her side in the company of honest men, and restores to you some touch of your long-lost manhood, and this is your gratitude in return, that, at the first hint of something in her conduct not quite clear to you, you pounce upon this foul doubt of her purity, as a vulture pounces on its filthy carrion. You

poor, mean cur ! You ingrate ! Oh, the sacrilege of it !'

It was all dark to him ; dark and terrible. But at least that one explanation he would never admit.

Might there not be something he had missed, some fine shade of meaning in the few poor little sentences which would put some other interpretation on them.

How hard he tried to twist them round, to make them say anything but what they said.

'I have loved you, John—you cannot doubt it—and yet, now, I sometimes ask myself if I have ever before known the fullest depths of my own heart, that utterly selfless love, which could count the sacrifice of everything which makes life pleasant as nothing, when the benefit of its object is the purpose in view.'

What *could* that mean? *How* could he make it mean anything but what it said?

‘I ought to have told you weeks ago, but was prevented by a foolish sentiment, or one which, at least, seems foolish now, when we are separated, most likely for ever.’

Was there any second meaning possible to that?

The love that had been between them had now dwindled to a mere ‘foolish sentiment!’

And this dwindling had begun ‘weeks ago!’ And all those weeks she had lain in his arms, and answered his looks with others as warm, as loving as his own. And yet she had been even then ‘finding the fullest depths of her own heart;’ reconciling herself to ‘the sacrifice of everything that made life pleasant;’ and

‘counting it as nothing for the benefit of this new love !’

Would reason admit of any hidden interpretation to such an outspoken declaration.

Well, then, he was lost indeed !

But he did not permit himself to blame her.

In her impulsive generosity, in her burning desire to rescue him, she had undertaken to bear a burden beyond her strength. She did not say so, but that was because her heart was full of mercy. She would not let him think that he was in any degree to blame for this separation. The terror of his past had overshadowed their love as he had prophesied it would.

And he was alone again. And this loneliness was a thousand thousand-fold worse than the loneliness she had rescued

him from. She had better have left him as she found him. That was the only thought of censure he allowed himself. After such a glimpse of paradise to be cast back, head foremost, into the old purgatory !

That night a strange thing happened in that house. The two rooms that the Smiths had occupied were burnt out, gutted completely, so that, of all the furniture and clothing and costly trifles of which the rooms had been full, nothing but ashes remained.

And the curious part of it was that the fire had so completely destroyed those two rooms and their contents, before it began to spread to the other parts of the house.

It had evidently started at the bedstead

in the back room, because it was just over the spot where it stood that the flames first made their way through the timbers of the ceiling to the roof, and alarmed the neighbourhood. When the official investigation elicited this fact, the mistress of the house looked more troubled than ever.

She had taken the lamp in to Mr. Smith a little after nine o'clock, although he had not rung for it, because she was getting anxious and wanted an excuse to go into the room. And Mr. Smith, looking well-nigh distraught with trouble, had rather resented the intrusion, she thought. But he had suddenly remembered that her bill was still unpaid, and had settled up with her, and told her that he should be off in the morning before she was up, and dismissed her with the intimation that he

should want nothing more that night.

When she spoke about a bed-room candle he had said he would carry the lamp through into the other room to undress by. And now she was wondering—there was a fluffy wool mat just inside the doors of communication—supposing him worn out with the fatigue and grief—carrying that heavy lamp from one room to the other—what more probable than a false step over the mat, and a forward plunge, lamp, man and all into the inflammable embrace of the bed-clothing!

But she was by nature of a cautious disposition, and she was careful to say nothing of this suspicion of hers to anybody in Doncaster. Things were bad enough without adding to the horror. To one person she did communicate her impression—Madame Morelli—and Morelli, in

turn, communicated the news to Mary; only, in passing it on, she stated as a positive fact what the landlady had only suggested as a probability. And Mary bought herself a black dress, and, struck to the earth by the double blow, said to herself that she should never smile again.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BLANK DRAW ON TREGARRON HEAD.

WHAT Mary went through when she received the letter from Madame Morelli announcing John's death, and recounting its tragic circumstances, is not an experience easy to describe. From her own point of view her life seemed to have come to a sudden end, to have stopped dead, with a shock and jar which stunned her faculties, and left her, physically and mentally, in a state of utter prostration. She lay for days in a kind of stupor,

scarcely unclosing her lips either to speak or to eat, scarcely moving, scarcely even thinking. Life was henceforth a blank to her, she would have welcomed death with avidity.

When she did think with any clearness, her thoughts all took the form of acute self-reproach. She blamed herself bitterly for the ready credence she had given to the story of John's iniquity.

She had been able to believe this evil thing of the living, but she could not believe it of the dead. Without the slightest foundation for this change of belief, it was yet perfect and complete. John had not wronged her in this cruel fashion—looking back she was amazed to find that she had really believed him guilty of the base deceit—how could she ever have thought so meanly of him?

The one circumstance which had led Morelli to doubt the identity of the John Smith on the marriage certificate with the John Smith in Mr. Burlington's company, had no influence with Mary; for she argued that, since he would not in any case have given a true account of himself, he would be as likely to describe himself as a boiler-maker as anything else. In fact, she had absolutely no reason whatever for her restored faith in John's truth, beyond the feeling at her heart, which assured her that he had not done her this foul wrong.

Woman's reasonless reasoning.

With this self-reproach eating into her heart night and day, she made very slow headway towards convalescence; and yet she did progress, slowly but surely, until there came a day when she was able to

leave the privacy of her room and face the daylight again.

By this time she had thoroughly made up her mind on one or two points.

She should never return to the stage. Her own tiny income would at least keep her from starvation, and when the necessity arose she would supplement it by efforts in some other direction. The old life which, with all its drawbacks, was hallowed to her by the memory of those few months of a so nearly perfect happiness, she would never take up again, never even approach again. Her professional experiences and all appertaining to them, she cast behind her as completely and regardlessly as a serpent drops its slough. If it pleased God to spare her and her little one, they would start a new life together. Meantime, thanks to her

past thrift, there was no need for haste in deciding on this new method of earning a livelihood.

Looking forward into her immediate future, realising its perils and terrors—more terrible even than usual because of her loneliness—a strange fancy took possession of her. She would like to pass that time of fear and suffering in John's birth-place ; she would like his child to be born there. She did not experience much difficulty in finding out all she wanted to know of his past now, when she had no longer his fear of the consequences to reckon with. She knew the tragedy that had clouded his youth had occurred in Cornwall, and, within a little, she knew the date of its occurrence. With this outline to go upon she soon found out all she wanted to know.

So it was John Penhala she had married! the great-grandson of that Joshua Penhala whose inventions had revolutionised the mining industry in Cornwall, eighty or ninety years ago.

She remembered the story well enough. 'The Carn Ruth Murder,' the papers had called it. She remembered, with a shudder, how universal was the belief in John Penhala's guilt. And yet he had sworn that he was innocent, and she believed him; with all her heart and soul she believed him.

In discovering her husband's real identity she had discovered something else—that there was no longer room for the least doubt on the subject of that previous marriage. At the time that 'John Smith, boiler-maker,' was married, John Penhala was a mere youth, living under his father's

roof. How the mistake had arisen would never be explained now, and since the main point—that it was a mistake—was established, she was content to let the other question rest.

It seemed as if the world had conspired to accuse him falsely.

She recalled what he had told her at Edinburgh, of a man who had sworn to be revenged on him for the wrong he had done Hagar Polwhele; a man who had gone the length of giving evidence, under oath, that he had been an eye-witness to the girl's murder.

And she recalled her own remark: 'If I could but see him!'

Well, now, there was no longer anything to prevent her seeing him. All the false swearing in the world could not harm John now.

She went to the British Museum and read up the Carn Ruth tragedy carefully, found out the name of the man who had given the evidence against John Penhala at the coroner's inquest, and made her plans for a journey into Cornwall.

Who could tell what might happen if she could place herself face to face with this false witness?

Perhaps this idea, ultimately, had as much to do with her visit to Carn Ruth as the other.

The idea that, by her efforts, his name might be cleared of this undeserved dishonour, that thus she might make some sort of compensation to his memory, if not to himself, for her past injustice, brought a subtle touch of comfort with it. Like all women, she reasoned from her heart rather than her head, and if her premiss

was unsound the deduction was unassailable.—It would be an inexpressible comfort to her to know she had been the means of clearing the dead man's name, from the stigma under which it had lain so long.

The summer was fast mellowing into autumn, faster perhaps along the northern coast of Cornwall than in more sheltered parts, for the reason that the restless winds blew more continuously across the exposed uplands of the Atlantic sea-board than elsewhere in England, and ruthlessly stripped the leaves from the trees as soon as the leaves grew dry and brittle. In more sheltered places the foliage might hang for weeks after it had changed colour, making the trees more beautiful in their decay than they had ever been in

their prime, and, thinning off little by little, give the eye time to grow reconciled to the change during the process of accomplishment.

But there was none of this graceful trifling with the ravages of time among the trees on the north Cornish coast. So soon as the leaf-stems grew shrivelled and brittle from the annual failure in the sap supply, it was only a question of a windy day, and the dream of summer was over and done with. For, look you, when Cornish winds blow there is no indecision about them, and the leaf that would hold to its parent stem in the teeth of a strong westerly hurricane, blowing inland straight from the Atlantic, needs all the moist elasticity and vigour of youth to enable it to bend to the blast, and spring back uninjured when the tempest has passed.

That is why the pine plantations crop up so constantly on the Cornish heights and uplands; no other trees will stand against the wind. And the pine conquers by its cunning when the strength of other trees is of no avail. Notice how innocent of all resistance seem the outermost trees of a pine plantation, when the wind comes roaring in from the sea to the attack; see how their heads bend, and their boughs pendulate, and their numberless needles shudder and quiver, in a very agony of fright and supplication, as one might easily imagine. Those countless spikelets of green would not presume to attempt to stop the advance of such a royal, roaring bully of a breeze as this, not they! See how the gale swishes its braggart way in among them, with the air of a conqueror, and mark what follows—Those unresisting

needles let the wind in—yes; and having got him in they *filter him*, strain him through a sieve so fine that they drain all his strength away from him, and when he emerges on the other side of the dark green belt he has to confess that, if he has been ‘let in,’ he is also ‘done for.’ Those myriads of yielding needles have strangled him. Gulliver and the pigmies over again with a vengeance.

And the fun of it was, that this particular fool of a Gulliver never appeared to learn any better; he had been at this game with the pine patch on the summit of Tregarron Head any time this last fifty years, always finding himself beaten before he got through the clump to the cottage on the other side, yet never tired of making the attempt.

There was a lady fighting her way up

the green slope to the cottage now, with the wind full in her teeth; a lady in mourning heavy enough for a widow, but without the orthodox insignia of that state.

Old Mrs. Edyvean stood at the cottage door watching her. Just there the air was as still as an inland summer afternoon. But for an occasional hiss among the very topmost of the pine boughs behind her, she would have known nothing of the gale thundering in from the ocean—for the wind had risen suddenly, within the last hour or two, and the surges had not yet begun the accompaniment of their deep diapason.

Mrs. Edyvean, from the shelter of her doorway, watched the lady's stubborn efforts to mount the hill, with a touch of apathetic wonder. Who was she, and

what in the world did she want out to Tregarron Head on such a day as this?

If anyone had suggested to Mrs. Edyvean that the stranger was putting herself to all this toil and trouble in the hope of gaining a few minutes' conversation with her, the honest woman would have scouted the idea as preposterous. Why, even her most intimate associates—people she had gone to school with in her far-off childhood—had left off troubling to come near her for more than these three years past, why should this stranger be anxious to seek her out? Such a thought never entered her head for a moment.

Still she watched the lady curiously as she drew near, remarking to herself that she did not look in a fit condition to be toiling up that hill, all by herself, in the face of such a bluster as that.

The pathway across the short close turf—worn for the most part by Mrs. Edyvean's own footsteps, for the cottage was out of the road from everywhere—led straight up to the door; and the lady paused, as she got within comfortable speaking distance, and leaned on her umbrella, panting a little.

‘What a wind!’ she said, with a smile which seemed to ask for a friendly response; and when she smiled Mrs. Edyvean discovered that she was very pretty, and quite young; in spite of the sharpened outline of her cheek, and the shadowy hollows under her eyes. ‘If I had known how it blew up here, I don’t think I should have ventured. But your cottage looks so romantic, perched up here, that I have been longing to get up

to you ever since I came to Carn Ruth, a week ago.'

'I think it would have done you no great harm if you had waited a while longer,' said Mrs. Edyvean; and, though the words sounded blunt, there was a softening in her manner as she spoke them, which took away considerably from their harshness.

'Perhaps not,' agreed the lady, with another of her pretty wistful smiles. 'But I'm always impatient when I want a thing; and, of all little sins, I think impatience brings most unhappiness to the sinner. Not that that holds true with me to-day. I'm not in the least unhappy to have come up here—now that I'm out of the wind—the air is simply splendid!' she opened her delicate nostrils and drew it in raptur-

ously, 'and the view is worth twice the climb. And that is Penhala's house, I suppose, on the opposite headland—you can't see it so well from down below. And how picturesque the tiny town looks from here, with its high-street all of a twist and a turn—like a naughty child when it is having its hair combed—and its houses all standing corners-wise to each other—as if they were sulking, and had turned their shoulders on one another.'

Mrs. Edyvean smiled. Things had never struck her that way, but she could see the gist of the simile when another pointed it out.

'If you only came to see the view,' she said, 'and bain't going on further, you'd mebbe as soon look sitting as standing;' and without further ceremony she dragged

a large wooden arm-chair through the door, and signed to the pale-faced little lady to seat herself therein.

She did not actually say 'Thank you!' but she sank down with a great sigh of relief, and looked up at the grim old country-woman with eyes that said as plainly as tongue could have said it, 'I do think you are the kindest woman in the world!' And Mrs. Edyvean liked it ever so much better than the spoken thanks.

'How good it is to sit when you're tired,' said the little lady, gently. 'It helps you to the full understanding of that beautiful promise, "I will give you rest."'

'Ay,' said the Cornishwoman, 'we never know how good a thing is till we need it—badly.'

The stranger assented silently, and leaning her chin in the hollow of her hand,

fell to studying the scene—the vivid blue of the inlet at her feet, the little gathering of houses at the bend of the tiny bay, the beautiful house on the opposite headland, gleaming white under the fast westering sun from among its dense plantations, the succession of silvery cascades that leapt down the face of the cliff, just at the point where the pines approached most closely to the edge, and the pretty little landing-stage underneath it, a short distance away to the right.

The view appeared to have a great effect upon Mrs. Edyvean's visitor; she grew absorbed in it: her pretty eyes—eyes with a look of patience in them which told its own story of sorrow—wandered from point to point of the landscape—from the bold headland jutting out into the sea which faced her, to the town lying at the head of

the bay, and then gradually back to the headland again—as if she were bent on imprinting every detail of the picture on her memory.

Mrs. Edyvean in turn grew absorbed in her visitor; and when she spoke presently, her words had no suggestion of abruptness. The silence had been so complete—but for that occasional hiss overhead among the pines—that neither of them were conscious that the conversational pause had been longer than usual when she said,

‘And you look as if you had needed it badly.’

‘I have,’ assented the lady, ‘and it seems to me I shall perhaps find it—here.’

‘Here?’

The sharpness of the tone roused her from her dreamy abstraction. She brought

her gaze back reluctantly from the scenery to the weather-beaten face watching her from the open doorway.

‘Why not?’ she asked, pleasantly. ‘It seems to me that this cottage of yours is a veritable haven of rest. Who could imagine that a dozen or two of pines would make such a perfect screen against the hurricane?’

The skilful little twist served its purpose of lightening the conversation.

‘I get it bad enough sometimes, when the wind is north with a touch of east in it. I’ve been near to being starved out once or twice, I can tell ee.’ The vernacular began to assert itself as soon as she forgot herself in the interest of her subject. ‘The trees keep the blaw off the house, let it blaw from the west as blaw it may. But when it blaws for a fortnight on

end as happens sometimes in winter time, and I run short of food, the pines bain't much good then. I've seen it blaw here so that no man alive could keep foothold along the laast quarter mile you've just come, and waun time I mind, thengs got so close weth me that I had to tie claws round my knees and roll myself ovver and ovver downhill, with garden-fark in my hand to stop myself when I got whizzy. It warn't just what you'd caall a pleasant experience, but it was that or starvation, and you'll do most thengs at bidding of hunger, I tell ee.'

'And have you been living this lonely life very long?' asked the lady.

'Aw, my dear, it do seem long to me. It's a matter of fowr years or more sen I saw my boy.'

'Then you must be the mother of the

Morris Edyvean my landlady was telling me about this morning. It seems a little hard—his leaving you so long alone.'

Mrs. Edyvean's eyes flashed.

'My son's doings is a sore subject between me and foak down to Carn Ruth,' she said. 'Seemed as if they'd been putting ee up to come and scandalise un to me, an' that's what I waan't submit to from anybody.'

'But indeed there has been nothing of the sort,' the stranger assured her, earnestly. 'It was only by chance that I heard your name this morning. I asked who lived up here, and an old fisherman told me; but he told me nothing but your name, I assure you.'

'And mebbe when you heard the naame you hadn't much need of further information?' observed Mrs. Edyvean, with her

keen dark eyes on the other's face. 'My son went to no end of trubble, aw that ded he, to maake his naame public propperty, fowr or five years ago, when the inquest was held on poor Hagar Polwhele.'

'Yes, I remembered the name at once.' The lady leant her face down on her hand as she made the admission, as if she felt self-conscious under Mrs. Edyvean's close regard. 'But I thought it might be a common name here.'

'No, there bain't no Edyveans here but me and my son. Aw, sure enough he's the man who's under an oath to hang young John Penhala, if so be as he ever puts a hand on him.'

Again there fell a silence between them, but this time it was not because the stranger was absorbed in admiration of the scenery, for her eyes were still on the

ground at her feet, and the supporting hand from under her cheek had been moved higher, and laid across her brow, so that nothing of her face could be seen. Looking at that shielding hand, it struck Mrs. Edyvean that it was less steady than it might have been; and she said to herself that the little lady had overdone herself in traipsing uphill in face of that blow.

‘Put like that,’ she said, breaking the silence in a lower voice than she had used before—a shocked voice, as it seemed to Mrs. Edyvean—‘put like that, it sounds terrible. It sounds as if you meant that he only wanted to hang young Penhala, as if he cared nothing at all for the strict justice of the case.’

A very curious look flashed into Mrs. Edyvean’s eyes as she heard. Had she really given expression to such a thought

as that? Then the closer she kept her lips shut on this subject the better. For it is one thing to think discreditable things of your own offspring, and another to speak of them to every passer-by you meet.

‘You’re ovver-quick at putting big meanings to little words,’ she retorted. ‘I had no such thought in my head, I do assure you. If it maks no difference to you, we’ll lev my son out of taalk altogether. It do seem as ef my temper got clain off weth me whenever hes naame’s as much as mentioned. Most like et’s because I do know how foak speak of un waun to another. Mebbe you can tell me if et’s true what people were saying last market-day, when I was down to Carn Ruth, about Mr. Penhala’s return.’

With the change of subject she had also

changed her manner. There was barely a trace of the 'Carnish' about the last-put question. She had evidently donned her best company manners again, and further confidences on the subject of her son's whereabouts were out of the question.

'What are they saying about his return?' inquired the lady, lifting a startled face from her hand. 'I have heard nothing.'

'Aw, most like tes only gossip, ma'am,' she said, noting with a little surprise her visitor's interest in the new topic, and beginning to feel a vague curiosity stirring within her. 'When people will be always yapping, it stands to reason the stock of truth must run short sometimes, and then tes that the lying begins.'

'Still,' persisted the little lady, quietly, 'I should very much like to know what

you did hear about Mr. Penhala's return? When I came here Mrs. Polwhele told me he had never been near Carn Ruth since —since the jury brought in that verdict against his son; and the general impression seemed to be that he had left the place for good.'

'So foaks thought. But thengs is sure to be different now he's married another wife.'

'Married?'

'Aw! tes surprising news that, surely! When a man's mourned hes first wife for a matter of fowrteen year, it do seem a bit laate in day to thenk about a second.'

'A second?' echoed the little lady again, her wits all hopelessly at sixes and sevens in the greatness of her surprise. And then, catching the inquisitive looks of the older woman bent on her in open inquiry,

she clasped her hands impulsively and broke into rapid speech.

‘You are wondering what all this has to do with me—why I, a stranger, should take so much interest in Mr. Penhala’s affairs? But the fact is I am not a stranger—not in the sense you take it. My husband was related to the first Mrs. Penhala—through his mother. Smith, my name is—Mrs. John Smith. Of course I knew, from my husband, how faithful Mr. Penhala had been to the memory of his first wife, and that was what made me so astonished at what you said. Is it true, do you think?’

‘That Penhala’s married again? Aw yes, that part of the news es true enough, I reckon. They was married just before laast Christmas time. They do say Penhala married hoping to have a child of hes own to take hes plaace over the way theere,

after him. But it seems the new wife is terruble delicate ; so happen that hope will fall to the ground along with the others.'

' But the other son—this unfortunate John ?'

' Aw ! John ! Well, tes always been my opinion, and foaks es coming round to my way of thenking by degrees, that that lad ded pay hes debt to God Almighty most as soon as it fell due. My son was the only soul as knawed aught about the real doings of that awful night, and he stud to't that the laast theng he seed o' John Penhala, he was tearing like mad along t'ither bank of the river. Seems to me 'twas just God's handiwork, to send him over cleff after the powr little wench he'd cheated and ruined. Anyways, Penhala he's behaved as ef the lad were dead. He's got act of parliament, or some such theng,

made out for him, so as he can leave all his property just as whim takes un.'

Mrs. Edyvean stopped abruptly, checked by a curious little sound from her listener.

'Oh, I cannot help it!' said Mrs. Smith, with a big dry sob; 'it is all so sad, so heart-breaking. It is well indeed that the poor boy is dead and out of it all. There was no longer a resting-place for the sole of his foot in this hard-judging world!'

Without any further pretence at concealment, she dropped her face in her hands and cried softly; and Mrs. Edyvean watched her with a touch of sympathy in her quick dark eyes.

'Tes like your husband knew the lad. You've heard taalk of un. Aw, 'twas a grievous business all through, 'twas. He had a smile like a May morning for sparkle. Aw, 'twas a promising lad, sure. And now

hes naame has passed out of the land for ever, and's father es setting all hes hopes on another son. 'Twas that I heard down to Carn Ruth, that they was coming hoam, so as new heir should be barn on th' estate.'

Mrs. Smith heard, with her pretty, patient, tear-dimmed eyes looking out sadly across the stretch of blue sea to the handsome house opposite, and her heart echoing the speaker's words—' 'Twas a grievous business all through!' one that could never be the better for her meddling. And yet, if John were innocent, how cruel it was to let his name rest under this stigma.

'There's waun as won't taake kindly to the new order of thengs, I'm thenking,' continued Mrs. Edyvean, her tongue smooth and glib enough now that she had got away from her son's doings. 'And that's

Penhala's nephew, a lad the foak about here call Mr. Paul. Sence John Penhala's downfall, foak have thought he would come in for propperty, seeing he's the only relation left to Penhala at all. And I have heard it said as he gave hissself all the airs of the young maaster, whiles when he's been down here in his holidays. This new wife, and the taalk of childern, must have takken curl out of hes feathers pretty well, I reckon. He's noan of your side of the house, ma'am, so ye'll no taake offence at my plain speaking. He's the son of poor Miss Penhala, who ran away with a blood-thirsty, revolutionising Russian. No good at all he wasn't, according to all account. Why, foak ded saay, though for that matter they'll saay most anytheng when waunce they taake a set against a man—but I believe this was really in the paapers—that

he was waun of them politician criminals that maade a plan to blow up the King and Queen of Russia, and all their childern, in a railway train. It do sound foolish only to saay such thengs, but I reckon there was sometheng in it—leastways they cut off the man's head, and they wouldn't go that far ef he hadn't gone against the law somehow.'

It was strange, Mrs. Edyvean thought to herself—after Mrs. Smith had thanked her for the beautiful rest, and taken her way down the green slope, out of the wind again—it was strange the whims and fancies of folks, how they would feel for the troubles of some people they had never seen in their lives, and how they did not care a brass button about another's. There was this little Mrs. Smith, for instance—she had cried over John Penhala's

trouble as if it had been her own, and yet, when it came to the tale of the Russian's misfortunes, she had scarcely seemed to give a thought to the whole thing. The human heart was a thing made up of freaks and fancies, and was as full of purposeless starts and contrarities as a young chick at roosting time—aw sure-ly!

CHAPTER IX.

A LOVE WHICH KNOWS NOT SACRIFICE.

‘MY good soul,’ said Dr. Winthrop, in a tone which suggested that his patience was on the verge of giving way, ‘don’t I tell you that I will be responsible for all the harm that can result to Mrs. Smith.’

Mrs. Polwhele glanced across the width of her best bed-room to the big four-poster on the other side, in the shadowy depths of which one could just distinguish the outlines of a slender form, and a pair of small hands wandering restlessly about

the quilt, searching for something they would never find. Pitifully helpless they looked as they groped, with unfailing regularity, first to one edge of the bed and then to the other, almost as if they were resigned to the fruitlessness of their quest, and were yet bound to continue it, as long as the power of movement was left to them.

As Mrs. Polwhele looked at them now, their troubled helplessness went straight to her heart, and she began to cry.

‘ ’Tisn’t natural you should feel about this matter as I do, doctor,’ she said. ‘ You’ve not known the poor little lady for weeks as I have. It seems to me like a downright piece of treachery—nothing more nor less—to take advantage of the poor little soul’s helplessness and friendlessness, to do a thing that we know she

wouldn't sanction if she could be consulted in the matter.'

'How do you know she wouldn't sanction it?' asked Dr. Winthrop, sharply. 'You don't know anything of the sort! My opinion is that, if she knew the loan of her baby for a day or two might be the means of saving Mrs. Penhala's life, she would lend it to us with the most perfect willingness.'

Mrs. Polwhele stopped her crying to listen, and the doctor, seeing it, hastened to press home his advantage.

'I can understand your feelings in the matter, and they do you great credit. You've got a notion in your head that we are going to take advantage of Mrs. Smith in some way, and you fancy that because she is not able to fight her own battles, you ought to fight them for her—my dear

soul, it is all the greatest nonsense in the world ! There is no wicked scheme on foot to rob Mrs. Smith of her baby, or change the children, or anything of that sort. All I want is the loan, for a few days, of this week-old babe—and I'll guarantee that poor Mrs. Smith won't be in a condition to miss it till long after it has served my purpose. We simply want to hide the fact that her own babe was born dead from Mrs. Penhala till she is better able to bear it—to show her a baby, any baby, and let her think it is hers, and give her something to live for. It can't hurt the child—a short drive in a close carriage on a warm day like this—it can't hurt the child's mother, because it will be back long before she'll ever miss it, and it can and may do a very great service to Mr. and Mrs. Penhala. Come now, act like

a sensible woman ! Wrap up the scrap of humanity in a warm shawl, put on your bonnet, and come up to the house with me straight away, and put the child yourself into the charge of the nurse up there. A real grand nurse she is, too—has nursed a duchess and half-a-dozen countesses in her time, so you need not be afraid that this young lady of yours won't be properly attended to.'

She was not afraid of that, she said, she was afraid of only the one thing—doing harm to Mrs. Smith. And if the doctor was quite certain that the child would be allowed to come back to its mother as soon as she wanted it, she would make no more bones about the matter.

'A nice sort of man you're making Mr. Penhala out to be,' returned the doctor, laughing—his good humour quite restored

by this submission to his wishes. 'I should think he is one of the last men in the world likely to run away with other people's children, and stick to 'em, in spite of their parent's wishes to the contrary.'

Mrs. Polwhele said nothing to that, only smiled a little at the doctor's nonsense, and signing to the young woman who was nursing the baby by the fire to follow her, turned and left the room.

It was on the evening of that same day that Mrs. Penhala, rousing herself suddenly from a quietness which the nurses had taken for sleep, asked them to send for her husband.

They had not far to go; he had only thrown himself down on a couch in the next room, to snatch a little rest after the

strain of the last twenty-four hours of anxiety.

His wife had seemed so much happier and quieter, since the child had been placed by her side, that he had allowed himself to hope that the worst was past, that the doctor's stratagem was to succeed after all, that the love and joy of maternity would prove strong enough to win her back from the very jaws of death. And he thought so still more when he saw her lying there, looking at the babe with a kind of adoration in her wan face.

She smiled up at him as he came, and put a weak hand out to him. And when he clasped it close in his, she drew his large, shapely fingers down, softly, to the tiny head on the pillow between them, and held them there.

'You will love it always, Lance!' she

whispered. 'Promise me you will love it with all your heart!'

'My darling!' he murmured, as if in remonstrance at the needlessness of the request.

'Ah, but I want you to promise in actual words,' she persisted, weakly. 'I am afraid that perhaps, if I die, there will be a little soreness in your heart against the poor, wee thing, and you will grudge it your love because it cost you me.'

'But it is not going to cost me you,' he said, smiling very tenderly at her; 'we are all going to have very happy times together yet, you and I and—the youngster.'

'Ellaline,' she put in, quickly; 'I want you to call her Ellaline. Yes, and I hope too, for those happy times, Lance; but still I should be so much more contented if you would give me this promise.'

‘My dearest,’ he said then, seeing how her thoughts dwelt on it, and knowing how all important it was that her mind should be completely at rest, ‘I will give you any promise you ask of me.’

The hot, feeble fingers gripped themselves a trifle closer round his, and laid them on the babe’s downy little cranium.

‘To love and cherish her always, as the very apple of your eye, Lance!’

‘Yes, darling.’

‘To bear always in mind that she was a solemn legacy from your wife, to guard her from evil, and to do all you can to make her a good, happy woman.’

‘My love, I will try my best.’

‘It is a promise,’ she said, softly. ‘You always keep your promises, Lance. Will you kiss her now—just there in front of her ear. She is a lovely baby, Lance—’

you will have a daughter to be proud of one day. Now kiss me, dearest. I think I shall be able to sleep now.'

It was about midnight when there began a startled bustle and movement in the sick-room, and messengers were sent flying through the suddenly aroused house in search of Penhala and the doctor.

They were both in time for the end. She was sinking simply from exhaustion. The window was wide open to the satin-like softness of the October night, but even so the room was warm, and the doctor presently signed to one of the nurses to move the child, that the patient might have more air.

But at the first attempt the dying woman made an effort, lifted her hand, and laid it detainingly on the babe. She raised her fast-fading glance as she did it,

and saw her husband's sorrowful face at the bedside. As their eyes met, through the gathering shadows, in hers there glimmered for an instant the ghost of a smile.

‘Your promise,’ she breathed, ‘you shall have—your reward.’ And then the shadows closed in quickly, and the light went out of her face as at an unseen touch.

And, leaning over to kiss her, Penhala felt the warm breath of the little one brush his cheek, and, turning instinctively, kissed that too.

‘Whose child is it?’ he asked, as they took the little creature from under the waxen hand. The dead woman had been very dear to him, and his heart was aching under its new sense of loss; but he and the heart-ache were such old cronies by this time, that he made no great

outward sign over its re-arrival. His handsome face took on an added touch of stillness, his lips paled under the unconscious pressure he put on them, his eyes darkened under their prominent brows, that was all those about him saw; the rest they knew without seeing. 'Whose child is it, doctor?'

The doctor took him by the arm and led him away into the next room, following the woman with the baby; who, after making the sleeping child comfortable on a pile of cushions, went back again to her duties in the death-chamber.

'It is the child of a Mrs. Smith, who came from no one knows where a few weeks ago, and put up at Mrs. Polwhele's.'

'A poor woman?'

'A lady,' returned the doctor, decisively; 'for the other, I can't say. There is

no want of money showing itself just now, at all events. I would not say as much among the townspeople, you know, but there is a good deal that puzzles me about the matter. In the first place—the name. No one in the place knows anything of her but her name. Suppose she dies—even now it is not unlikely—what chance of identification does the name “Smith” carry with it? Then, of all places in the wide world to choose for her confinement, why should she pitch upon Carn Ruth? Without society of any kind, with inferior accommodation, and ten miles from the nearest railway-station. There’s only one respect in which it possesses any marked advantages, and that is, as a hiding-place.’

Penhala lifted his sombre eyes from the face of the sleeping babe to look at the speaker.

‘Yes,’ he went on, evidently in answer to the look, ‘that is my impression also. It was desirable that this poor little beggar’s birth should be concealed, and that was why it was arranged that it should take place in Carn Ruth.’

‘Then perhaps—’ said Penhala, and paused. What could he do with a girl child at his heels, he was thinking. And yet, if his own child had lived, he would have had to manage somehow. And his wife’s last action had been an attempt to keep the babe near her, her last breath had been spent in reminding him of his promise to love and cherish the child. Under the influence of emotions born of such moments as these, the wisest men are sometimes guilty of the grossest folly. ‘Then perhaps,’ he began again, and this time he completed his sentence, ‘the poor

soul might be induced the more easily to part with the child.'

'You would take it—adopt it?'

The doctor was honestly surprised.

'I gave my wife a solemn promise this afternoon to do the best I could for the poor thing—I would carry the promise out, if it were anyway possible.'

It was on the very tip of Winthrop's tongue to advise him not to give way to a sentimental impulse, the indulgence of which might cause him life-long regret. But though the thought was in his mind the words were difficult to say. There was something in Lance Penhala's face, as he stood there, looking down at the sleeping child, which for the time being put worldly wisdom at a discount. Without quite understanding the bias of his silence, the doctor left his shrewd advice

unspoken, contenting himself, instead, with a mental memorandum to put Lady Penruddach on to the task to-morrow.

But what is to be, will be; and two months later, when Mrs. Polwhele at last considered Mrs. Smith well enough to hear the whole truth about everything, the baby was still up at the big house on the hill.

‘We have been telling you all this time that the baby was away, out at nurse,’ said the innkeeper, ‘and in a manner of speaking it was true, my dear.’ They had grown to know each other very well during those weeks of the constant intercourse of a sick-room. ‘But it’s not perhaps just the sort of nursing you have been fancying.’

With that childlike interest in out-of-door trifles which invalids feel when they

first move from the bed to the window, Mrs. Smith was watching the boatmen warp a large smack round the head of the little pier that lay under Tregarron Head. But there was a touch of anxiety in Mrs. Polwhele's voice, and Mary, recognising it, turned quickly to know the cause.

‘You’re not going to disappoint me again?’ she cried. ‘I have been so patient all this time. Were you ever a mother? Do you know how my heart hungers for a sight of my baby? There—’ this with a sudden new fear in her eyes —‘there is nothing wrong with it! It is not——’

‘No, no! my dear,’ cried Mrs. Polwhele, ‘don’t fuss yourself with that notion. The babe is a real beauty, and, come what may, you shall see her to-day if your mind is set on it. The child is staying up at

Penhala's house, and I'll send Jenny up with——'

'Penhala's house?' Mrs. Smith half-rose from her big chair, with every drop of blood ebbing away from her face. 'Why have you sent my baby there?'

'Oh dear, oh dear!' began Mrs. Polwhele, scared out of her life at the way her news was taken, 'I always said harm would come of it—I almost went down on my knees to talk Dr. Winthrop out of it. My dear, it was none of my doing!'

But the first shock of the news was over now, and Mrs. Smith dropped back in her chair, trembling, but a little on her guard again.

Her little one in its grandfather's house! What strange chain of circumstances had brought about such an accidental piece of justice as that?

‘You see, Mrs. Smith,’ continued Mrs. Polwhele, gathering courage as she proceeded, ‘when the doctor suggested it—suggested that your little one should go up yonder—it was as a last hope for poor Mrs. Penhala. She kept on all the time asking for her child, and they were afraid to tell her that it had never lived, they thought that the shock would kill her outright. And then the doctor thought of your babe—then just a week old—and dashed down in the carriage to fetch it. My dear, I wouldn’t have let it go only he pressed me so hard, and promised me so solemn that it should be back at your side long before you were sensible enough to miss it—you see, my dear, he couldn’t foresee then what was going to happen, any more than any of the rest of us. And if we had we should have been hard put to

it to decide what to do for the best, without your word on the matter.'

'The child is well?' asked Mary again. She found it necessary to keep that fact well to the fore, during Mrs. Polwhele's rambling explanations. 'You're quite sure my baby is well, and straight, and strong?'

'My dear, it is a picture of a child!' declared Mrs. Polwhele; and at that Mary sighed, and sank back in her seat, and possessed her soul with patience, till she should understand how this most wonderful condition of affairs had come about.

And when she did understand; she sat very still in her big chair, gazing out of window. But her eyes had no perception of the material in them; they had the appearance of looking inward, as if they were holding converse with her own soul.

Mrs. Polwhele—having finished her story of Penhala's promise to his dying wife, and of his desire to fulfil that promise by putting the strange child in the place of his own dead babe—stood for a few seconds watching the rapt look on Mary's face. And then, from somewhere, the fancy came to her that the little lady was praying—maybe for guidance in this matter of her little one's future, and she stole quietly away and left her to it.

She never remembered, when she had been in any perplexity concerning her Hagar, doing anything of that kind herself. She wondered a little, as she crept quietly down the stairs, whether things might not have gone differently if she had.

To Mary, thinking her busy thoughts by the little window, it seemed as if God's own right hand were shaping her child's

destiny. As she realised all that had happened during her unconsciousness, a touch of something that was nearly akin to awe settled down on her. In her then state of mind she imagined something of the supernatural in the whole arrangement, from beginning to end. She lost sight of the perfectly natural sequence of the events which had led to her presence in Carn Ruth at that especial time; she was in the mood to impute the event itself, and all the circumstances leading to it, to the immediate influence of that higher unseen power, a belief in which comes back at times to the very worst of us.

How should she reconcile herself to the loss of her little one? Alas! that she did not know; she only knew that, reconciled or not, it was a loss she would have to submit to. How could she dare to rebel

when heaven itself interfered, so unmistakably, to restore to her little one some share of her just rights.

‘I will bring the child up as my own,’ was the message Penhala had sent to her, ‘if the mother will undertake to leave it in my hands entirely.’

And Mrs. Polwhele had said that he was already learning to love the tiny babe—the only child of his only son! And was it likely that she would step in, with her selfish jealousy, and prevent such a righting of a past wrong as this? She must go away somewhere—a great distance away it must be, because she knew her own weakness—and do battle with her mother’s yearning as best she might.

Yes, a great way off she must go, because there would be times, oh, she knew it quite well, when her child’s well-being,

her desire to see justice done to John's child, her fear of betraying the whole truth to John's father, all, all would count as nothing beside the mother's mad heart-hunger for her child. And at these times she would not be able to control herself, that unconquerable yearning would drive her, against her better judgment, to make some effort to see her wee love.

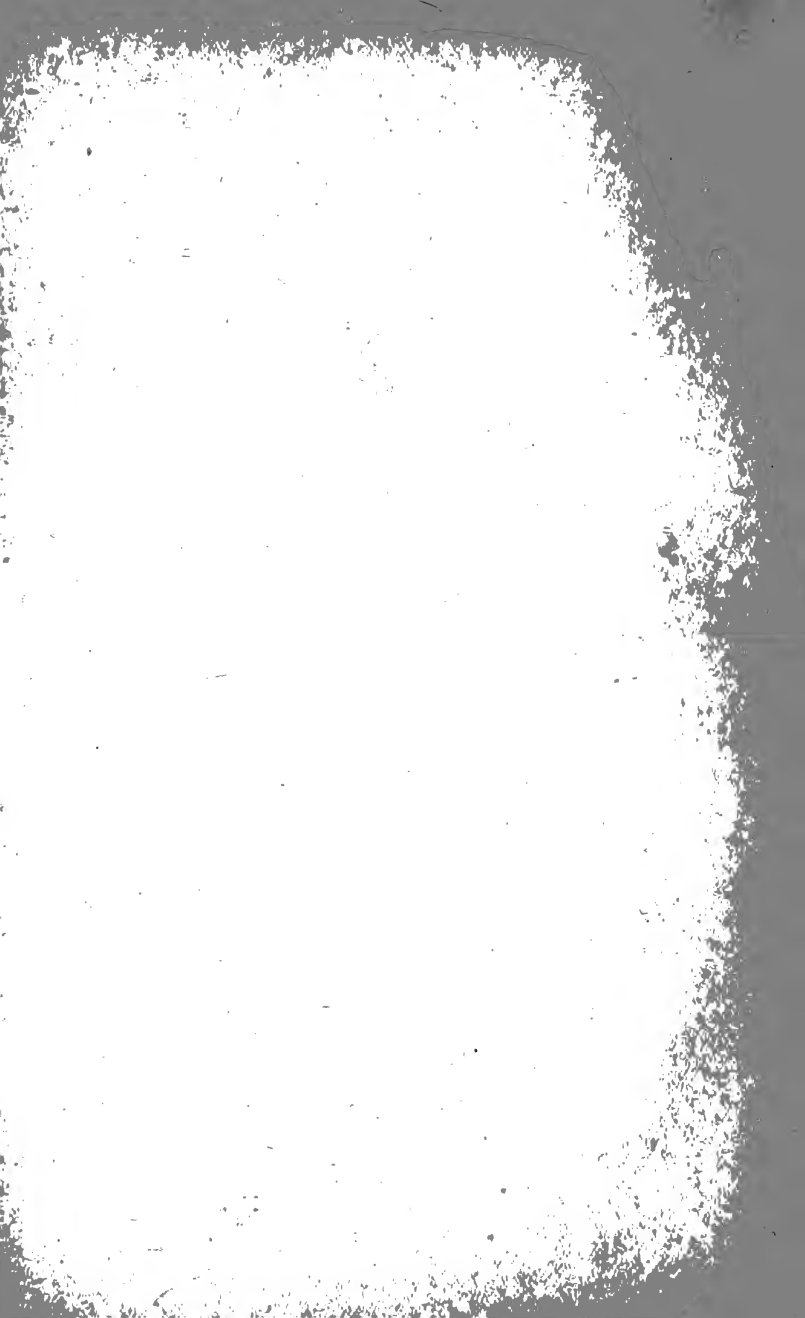
And the only safeguard against yielding to this selfish impulse would be to put such a great distance between herself and her baby—poor John's baby who had never had a father—that the madness would have time to cool down while she was making her way to her darling, that she would have time to conquer the jealous craving before she reached the child's presence, time to persuade herself that her duty to her child demanded her imme-

diate return the way she had come, there to endure, as best she might, the aching void in her heart until the madness came upon her again, and drove her forth on another fruitless journey.

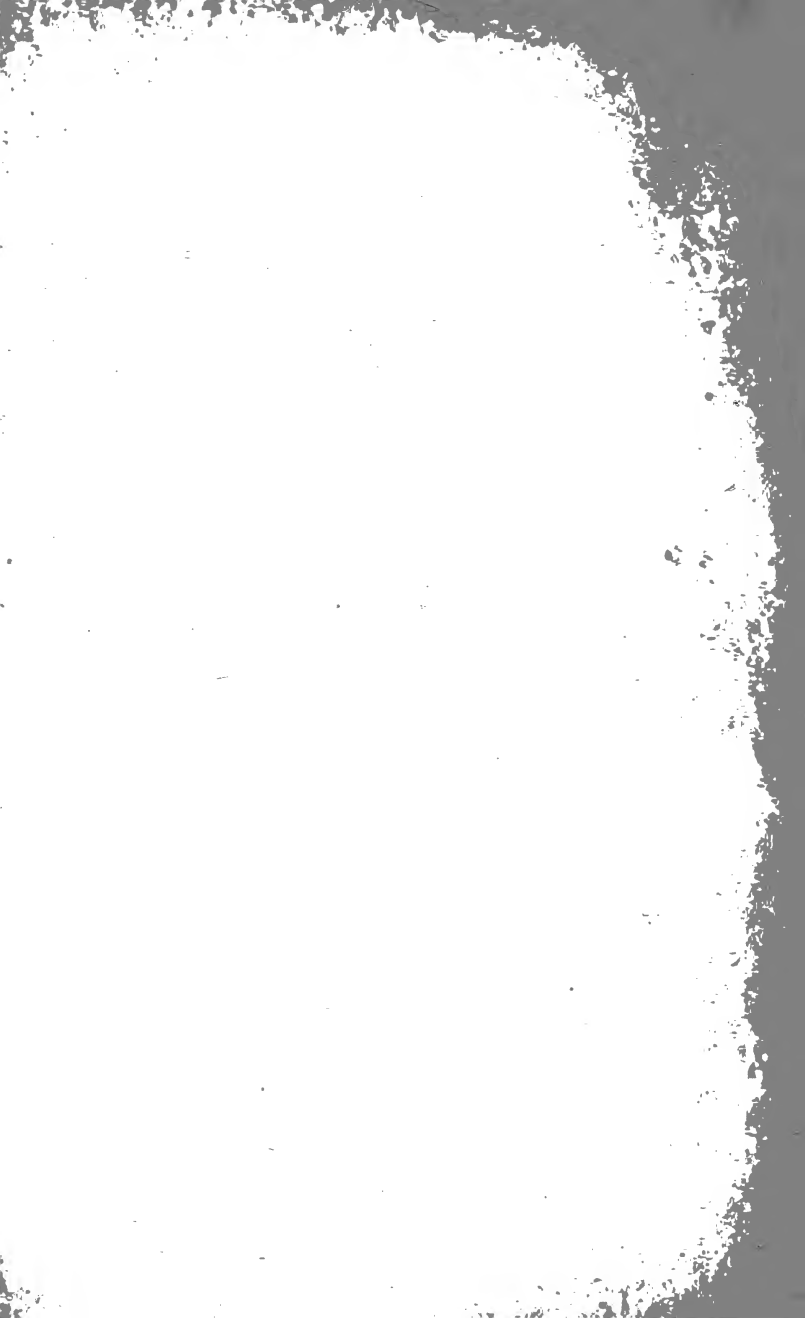
And so Lance Penhala was allowed to fulfil his wife's dying request, and carried the little creature off to London with him, glad to once more shake the dust of Cornwall off his feet. For it seemed to him, now more than ever, that there was a curse on the beautiful house his grandfather had built for his descendants, and Lance almost felt like registering a vow never to set foot in Carn Ruth again.

But he was not a man given to the utterance of hasty vows, so he contented himself instead with making arrangements for a very long absence. And, as the years passed on, the beautiful house

among the pines gradually sank into the condition of a mere shooting-box, for the use of Mr. Penhala's intimate friends, when they came down for a week or two's wild-duck shooting among the retired pools on the estate.



BOOK III.



CHAPTER I.

THE THIN END OF THE WEDGE.

SEVENTEEN years, look at it as leniently as you may, is a large slice out of a man's life. Drop a man at twenty-five and pick him up again at forty-two, how does your meeting with him differ from a meeting with an absolute stranger? His features are probably changed past all recognition, so that, as you talk to him, you find yourself every now and then searching his face in vain for some trace of the old familiar personality. But, marked as the change

of feature is, you soon discover that the change in the man himself is still more pronounced, and, often, still more to be regretted; and you begin to wonder, with a new touch of keenness in your mental vision, whether this extraordinary alteration is confined to your friend—whether, in fact, the transformation in yourself, your own outward man and temperament, is not even more marked and more to be deplored than the other man's.

Perhaps the change—the moral change, at all events—is more marked between twenty-five and forty than in any other fifteen years of a man's life. Romance, a living reality at twenty-five, is at forty a dead letter. The mature man of the world no longer believes in things as they seem, he knows them for what they are; and even while he poohs! and pishes! at

the folly he has cast behind him, he would gladly exchange some of his hard-earned *knowledge* for a touch of the old, sweet *belief*. He has long since found out that the world, as it is, is not half so desirable a place to live in as the world of his youth's imagining.

But this particular change had been over with Lance Penhala before the death of his second wife. He was already approaching fifty when that misfortune befell him, and finally decided him to make no further attempt to perpetuate the Penhala family in the direct line. A lapse of seventeen years, therefore, brings him nearer to seventy than sixty. And yet, as far as heart and feeling go, he is a younger man this morning, as he sits talking across the table to his daughter Ellaline, than he was all those years ago.

In some quaint way Ellaline has managed, in her father's household, to reverse the usual order of things. All her life she has associated with grown-up people, but instead of taking the contagion of their staidness and dignity, and developing into that saddest of anomalies, an old-fashioned child, she has infected her elderly playfellows with juvenility, and inspired them with a youthfulness, a capacity for enjoyment, a general gladness of spirit not usually associated with people of their years.

Old Parsons, the Penhala butler—a faithful old servant who goes wherever his master goes, and has done for this last twenty years or more—has a name of his own for Ellaline; he calls her ‘Miss Sunshine;’ and the name fits her without a crease. All her life she has been absorb-

ing sunshine, and distributing it to those with whom she comes in contact. Nature has bestowed upon her the priceless blessing of a sunny spirit, and circumstances have combined to foster this especial loveliness of her disposition. Temper? Oh, yes, she has a temper; easily enough roused, too, on some points; but resentment is a thing unknown to her, and sulkiness a form of madness she does not comprehend.

And she is wofully spoilt, most wofully! She was giving an illustration of this last point now, as she discussed the morning's letters with her father.

They were in the morning-room of the big Brighton house where two-thirds of their year was generally spent, and, November though it was, the sun was glinting on the waves just across the road, and on the

road itself, with a brilliancy which seems to strike one as being more noticeable at Brighton than in most places.

‘And now you are going to disappoint me again!’ she cried, as her father came to the end of the letter he had been reading; and there was mutiny in her whole bearing. ‘This is the third year you have promised to spend Christmas at Penhala’s house, and now you are going to slip out of it again!’

There was a lady with white hair—but a very pretty lady for all that—busy among a lot of bills at a writing-table at a little distance. She looked up at the disrespectful tone of this outburst.

‘Ella, my dear!’ she said, in gentlest remonstrance. ‘Ella!’

‘Oh, yes!’ flashed out the young lady, with a glance and a shrug in the speaker’s

direction. 'Of course, Mamma Mary, you'll join in the conspiracy to put me down and tyrannise over me; you always do!'

At this Mr. Penhala looked at the white-haired lady, and, meeting her amused glance, he broke into laughter; and the next moment they were all three laughing in chorus.

But Ellaline was the first to recover her gravity.

'It's all very well to laugh,' she said, trying to pout again. But with all her efforts she only succeeded in making herself look more bewitching than ever as the pout and the dimples struggled against one another for supremacy. 'But to me this is really a crushing blow. Here am I, a grown-up young woman, turned seventeen, and I have never yet had so much as a

peep at the property which is my birth-right! Oh, I'm not really finding fault with you, you know, dad dear,' she added quickly, as she saw a sudden cloud darken her father's face. 'Of course you would not have kept away from Carn Ruth all these years, if you had not had your own very good reasons for it. Only it does seem just a weeny, weeny bit hard that, as I had at last talked you out of your morbid avoidance of the place, this long-lost cousin should have turned up to shatter my hopes again. I suppose we couldn't take him down to Cornwall with us, eh?'

'I'm afraid not. I think you will have to consent to another postponement, my dear. You see what Paul says—that his object in coming to England is to obtain employment as secretary or corresponding

clerk, or some post of the kind. Would he be likely to obtain an appointment of that sort in Carn Ruth, do you think? Come now, make the best you can of it, and I'll drive a bargain with you, and promise to take you to Cornwall at the end of the summer. You will get a far better first impression of the place then, than now.'

Ellaline was immediately radiant with delight.

'Will you really give up the grouse on purpose?'

'Yes, really. You see, Ella, I am particularly anxious to do all I can for Paul Petrovsky. My second marriage, though he was only a school-boy at the time, was a great blow to him—he had hoped to be my heir. He never came near me afterwards, spent his holidays instead in town,

with old friends of his father's—political refugees, and all that sort of thing. That was how he fell into trouble. He doesn't say so here, but I'm almost certain that some of these years of silence he has spent in prison. My dear, you don't understand'—Ellaline had looked scandalised—'I don't mean for picking a pocket, or breaking into another man's house. These unfortunate patriots look upon a term of imprisonment as a thing to glory in, rather than be ashamed of. There is no doubt in my own mind that Paul fell into the hands of some of his father's old associates, and was sent by them on some mission of danger, and got caught, and had to suffer for it. He's just the fellow to do it too; I remember how he gloried in his father's death, when he was only a little chap of ten or eleven, because he believed it

would benefit The Cause. If he could talk like that then, what would he be when he grew up? Oh, he has been in trouble sure enough; and for that very reason I should be especially sorry to do anything that could give him the idea that I was not glad to see him.'

Ellaline went and put her arms round her father's neck, and kissed him, and told him he was the greatest darling in all the world. But the trouble did not quite clear from his face under her caresses, as was usually the case; when he went away to his study to answer his letters it was there still, and she saw and was perplexed by it.

Although Penhala had fought his nephew's battle so long as there was a shade of antagonism to contend against, he was no sooner alone than he had to

begin the battle over again. This time his antagonists were his own prejudices.

Way back in the past, years ago, the knowledge had come to him—without any seeking on his part—that that unpardonable cruelty of his son's, the perpetration of the sham marriage between him and Hagar Polwhele, had been suggested and carried through, from beginning to end, by Stanislaus Petrovsky. It was this knowledge that was dogging his thoughts now. He might tell himself as often as he chose that it was the height of injustice to make the son in any degree answerable for the backslidings of his father, and still the feeling remained with him, that he would willingly have given ten thousand pounds to buy Paul Petrovsky's absence just now.

The introduction of these Russians into

his family circle had hitherto always brought disaster with it; that he should dread a renewal of the intercourse was scarcely to be wondered at.

And yet he could see the injustice of this prejudice against a man who had never done him nor his the least harm; but for all that the prejudice continued to exist. Never, under any circumstances, could he feel a genuine liking for the son of the man who had led his lost boy into such depths of scoundrelism. And, just because of his secret feeling of repugnance, he felt the more compelled to show his nephew every outward sign of courtesy and hospitality. His affection or liking he could not compel in any given direction, his hospitality and personal influence he could.

By that day's post a warm invitation

went out to Paul Petrovsky, pressing him to make his uncle's house his home, as long as it suited his convenience so to do.

Ellaline, meantime, was discussing the situation with considerable force and candour.

As she turned with a look of half comical disgust to the lady at the writing-table, she found that she also had been watching Mr. Penhala from the room.

‘You noticed it too, then!’ she exclaimed, with a kind of make-believe anger she often indulged in. ‘I suppose I’m a mean, selfish little brute, but if this foreign bogey of a cousin is going to make my father often look like that, I shall wish him back in his Russian prison, with the rest of his precious patriots.’

Mamma Mary shook her beautiful head, and smiled a very little, and turned her

glance to her bills again. It looked as if she knew exactly how much worth were these unaniable declarations of Ellaline's, and had given up protesting against them.

But this time Ellaline darted across the room, and snatched up the obnoxious pile of bills before Mrs. Smith could prevent her.

‘Dearest darling, I entreat of you not to shut me up in that cruel fashion!’ she cried, tragically. ‘I’m just dying to ask a thousand questions, and the moment I begin to talk, you put on your most forbidding air of rebuke, and inform me, with a look, that you refuse to have anything to do with me.’

The lady who had been addressed as Mamma Mary folded her hands with an air of resignation.

‘You overgrown baby!’ she said. ‘I

wonder will you ever be anything else, Ella?’

‘Not as long as I can prevent it,’ retorted Ella, with a wicked smile. ‘The babies get the best of it in this world, Mummy; who’d be grown up if they could help it?’

Mamma Mary shook her head again, this time in obvious agreement with the question, and Ellaline, having safely disposed of the bills, perched herself on the edge of the writing-table, and began to ‘touch up’ the plenteous ripples of the elder lady’s silvery hair.

‘Mummy, I want to know heaps of things. This cousin Paul—Do you know him?’

‘How should I? You heard what your father said? The foolish young man has never been near him since his second

marriage. I did not appear on the scene until some years after that event, you know.'

'No, of course. Naturally. My father would hardly engage a governess before there was anything to teach, would he? I wonder what the horror is like?'

'Ella dear, don't! The poor fellow is evidently in trouble, and——'

'Oh, yes, I know,' returned Ella; 'but he made my father look glum. I don't see that his misfortunes are any excuse for that. And, indeed, I can't see why my father should allow himself to be worried, by the misfortunes of a person who has turned his back on him for eighteen years, can you?'

Mamma Mary did not answer at once. She was trying to decide in her own mind why Mr. Penhala was so evidently dis-

quieted by this news of his nephew's return. Surely there was something more than sympathy in it? Was it not more probable that this disturbance arose from an altogether different train of ideas.

It was years since she had last heard the mention of Paul Petrovsky's name; indeed, it seemed to her that she had scarcely heard it since the first year of her residence in Mr. Penhala's house. Perhaps Penhala had allowed himself to slip into the belief that this nephew of his—his heir-at-law, as the white-haired lady well knew—would never be seen or heard of again in England; perhaps it was his re-appearance itself, and the imbroglios likely to arise from it, which had brought that look of anxiety to Penhala's usually placid brow. Ellaline had hitherto been his all in all, his darling,

whose wish was invariably his law—could it be that he foresaw already that all this would have to be altered now this young man was on the scene again? What more likely? Then was this long spell of peace and happiness—such happiness as in the day of her trouble she had not dared to hope for—to come to a sudden end with Paul Petrovsky's re-appearance? Was this fire-brand, this revolutionist, to break up the peace of their summer sky, to plunge them into a vortex of strife and duplicity, in which each one would be secretly striving to undo the scheme of his neighbour? It seemed to her that with his coming something of the sort was bound to happen, and she found herself almost echoing Ellaline's wish—that he was back in his Russian prison with his fellow patriots.

Ellaline's fingers stopped suddenly their little caressing touches among Mamma Mary's hair, and, dropping swiftly to her chin, turned her face up for inspection.

'Why, it has got hold of you too!' cried the girl, in a little fury. 'You look more worried than the dad. What in the name of mystery does it all mean? What is there about this unknown cousin of mine, that the mere talk of his coming should throw you all into this state of miserable worry? I believe you do know something about him after all, and that it is something dreadfully wicked.'

'My dear, I know nothing whatever!' said Mamma Mary, and for some reason which she could not have explained to save her life—for, even if she would, how could she have put the foolish incom-

prehensible foreboding at her heart into words that should carry any conviction to her hearer—the unusual tears came rushing to her eyes, and she rose in quick vexation at her own folly, and walked over to the window.

But Ellaline was after her like a shot, and pulled her down into a low arm-chair, and knelt by her side, and hugged and comforted her in her own peculiar fashion.

‘Why, Mrs. Smith, to think you should cry about it!’ she said, reproachfully. ‘I know now why you don’t want him to come—you think he will have to be here a great deal with us, as one of the family, and you are fancying he will be what you spoke about the other day—the thin end of the wedge of separation between us two. But he

shan't, darling, he shall never come between us—he should not, even if I liked him ever so, instead of hating him heartily with all my might, as I have made up my mind to do. It will take something much more wonderful than this foreign conspirator, to shift you out of your own place in my heart—the second place, you know, dear, and a good second too; it's you and dad first, and the rest nowhere.'

Mrs. Smith smiled down into the girl's face, just now so sweet and tender with the desire to comfort her dear friend. She made no attempt to put her right as to the real reason of her breakdown. It was as well she should think her own solution of the mystery the right one.

'But it can't be so always, you know, Ellaline. I must find my level again, sooner or later. You and your father have

done your best to make me forget it, but others are not so regardless of their dignity. Next season, when you are A. Personage, with a recognised position in society, you will find how impossible it is for "Miss Penhala, the heiress," to keep to the very spirit of the old friendship with her governess.'

'Nothing is impossible,' retorted Ellaline, with an imperious uplifting of her pretty head; 'or at least very little is. Friendship—the very same real, true, old friendship that it has always been—will certainly never be impossible between you and me, and I won't allow you to say that it will. And another thing, Mamma Mary—I wish you would not speak of yourself as my governess.'

'But, Ellaline——'

'Oh, yes, I know all that! You gave

me lessons and all the rest of it; but a governess—pooh! That German creature who goes to the Menthorp girls every morning is a governess. You don't suppose you were ever that sort of thing to me? A person who set me tasks, and punished me if I didn't do them; a poor thing that I made open fun of to your face, and looked upon as a very small step indeed above the servants in the social scale.'

'My darling!' Mrs. Smith said, gently, and said no more, because there was something in her throat that made speaking difficult.

'Yes, that's just it!' cried Ellaline, with a tiny laugh, and she laid her peach-like cheek for an instant down on the unsteady hands on Mrs. Smith's knee. 'You've put it in a nut-shell, Mamma Mary. I am your

darling more than your pupil, and you—oh, a million times more than my governess you are my mother, my own dear Mother Mary.'

Mary said nothing, but in the look she bent on the girl's downbent head there was a world of unshed tears.

'I often wonder,' went on the bright young voice, pulsing with life and happiness and love, 'so very often, what on earth would have become of me if you had never been sent to take care of me. I can't think of my life, somehow, apart from my little mother. I woke up in the middle of the night about a week ago—I don't often do it, you know—and found the thought there, already, in my head—What would my life have been without Mamma Mary to love and to love me?—Wasn't it strange? I think I must have been dream-

ing it. What a wonderful thing it was, when you come to think of it, that you and I should have come across each other in that remarkable way, just when we were needing each other so terribly.'

Again Mary made no answer. Had she chosen she could have told of years of patient waiting, and watching, and planning which had led up to that apparently accidental meeting between her and the little child; a meeting timed so exactly to happen just when the mite was beginning to need some other companionship than that of her nurses. But the moment for such a disclosure as that had not arrived yet, perhaps never would arrive. The mother's heart—so loyal to her child's welfare, so awake to its own yearning—could not decide clearly whether she wished such a time to arrive or not. Whenever she

put the question to herself—as she did sometimes, poor, loving mother—there came such a rush of joy, and fear, and doubt, and agony into her mind, as to how Ellaline would receive the truth, that she was too mazed to be able to answer one way or the other. She could but fold her hands meekly and wait, trusting all might yet be well; and oh, the strain and stress it was sometimes—just to sit still and wait, when her heart was bursting with its burden of love. And the child's loving little tricks and witcheries made it more difficult than ever. But she managed somehow to keep up appearances, though sometimes she hardly knew herself how she escaped from the assaults of Ellaline's impulsive affection, with her secret still unspoken.

There was another point, too, which

kept her constantly on the alarm—Ellaline was growing so like her father, John. What if Mr. Penhala should see this likeness and begin to make enquiries? Every fresh return they made to the London house in Eaton Square, the first time they entered the dining-room, where John's portrait still hung, she expected Penhala to call out in sudden affrighted discovery of the truth. And what would happen then she did not dare to imagine. Would he denounce Ellaline as the daughter of a murderer? Perhaps. Oh, poor, high-spirited little Ellaline! Would he accuse her of having knowingly taken part in the scheme for securing the shelter of her grandfather's house? He might. Men under the influence of sudden passion were invariably unjust. And then Ellaline, awaking to the fact that she too had

been deceived, that she was only his daughter by adoption, and that he was accusing her of worming her way into his house by underhanded means—how was she likely to behave? She would walk out of his home, like the proud, reckless little termagant she was, heedless of all consequences.

And then—surely then would come the mother's opportunity! But the mother could not forget the confession she would have to make: the confession of seventeen years of systematic duplicity; and because of the greatness of her love, her fears were great also. Her spirit fainted within her at the mere imagining of Ellaline's scorn, at the mere thought of the blaze of indignation in her eyes as she turned on her, with the inevitable '*et tu, Brute!*' Have you too deceived me—you, whom above

all the world I have held in my heart of hearts ?

No wonder her hair was white before its time, poor, tender, conscience-haunted creature that she was !

And the first thunder-bolt athwart the blue came from the very quarter she had anticipated.

‘How extraordinary,’ said Paul Petrovsky, within a quarter-of-an-hour of his arrival, as he seated himself at luncheon opposite John’s portrait ; ‘I fancied I saw it before—now I am certain of it ! I always thought John was the exact image of his mother, Uncle Lance, not a touch of the Penhala breed about him, and yet, look at the strong likeness between him and this other Penhala—they might be own brother and sister.’

CHAPTER II.

KATERFELTO.

IN after times Penhala looked back to the little incident in wondering surprise at his own blindness; at the moment he chose to think that, because he had not discovered the likeness himself, it existed chiefly in Paul's imagination, and dismissed the matter as not worth a second thought; nothing was more common than these accidental likenesses. To Paul, on the other hand, believing Ellaline to be his uncle's daughter, the likeness between her

and John Penhala seemed nothing extraordinary. And so the crisis passed, and the colour came back to Mary's face before anyone had noticed her ghastly pallor, and, for the time, the thing was over and done with.

A little to her own disgust, Ellaline found that she could not hate this new cousin as thoroughly as she had made up her mind to do. Perhaps his perfect manners had some attraction for her; and there was something else about him which could not fail to attract her more than any mere gift of manner, a something which, for want of a stronger word, must be called 'impressiveness.' The man had suffered years of martyrdom for the cause he believed in, and the consciousness of suffering for the right has, must inevitably have, an elevating influence on the

sufferer. Those years of silent endurance in a Russian prison had given a touch of genuine dignity to Paul Petrovsky's glances and bearing, which nothing could ever quite eradicate.

To Ellaline, because of the solemnity of his manner and the severity of his dome-shaped forehead, and the curious pallor of his skin, and the subdued quietness of his voice, he seemed almost as old as her father; and indeed at first sight he did appear nearly as old at thirty-two as his uncle at sixty-six. The only really young thing about him was his glance. His eyes were like his father's—deep, penetrant blue eyes, set in big, shadowy hollows, and protected still further from observation by large, prominent brows of a dark brown—the only conspicuous touch of colour about his face. Indeed, but for

that inner dignity which made itself felt the moment you were brought into communication with him, the clearest impression he would have left on the mind of the ordinary observer would have been one of general insipidity—the short growth of flaxen hair and beard, the stony pallor of his skin, and the still tones of his voice, were, of themselves, so wanting in individuality. But the brows partly redeemed the face from its colourlessness, and the eyes, had they been in evidence, would have completed the redemption. But very few people ever thoroughly saw Paul Petrovsky's eyes—they had betrayed him once, in the earlier days of his devotion to The Cause, and, since he could not bring them into subjection to his will, he kept them hidden as much as he could. It was the one tiny blemish in his man-

ners, Ellaline thought, that he looked so seldom at you in conversation.

But although he so rarely met the glances of those about him, there was little or nothing that went on around him which he did not see. He had learned the lesson, 'to hear and see all, and say nothing,' in a very severe school, and it was likely to cling to him all his life.

And he saw nothing more quickly, from under the penthouses of his prominent brows, than his cousin Ellaline's beauty and sweetness. He was living his daily life with her, and, outward appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, he was still a young man.

If she had been odious in herself and hideous to look at, he would, in all probability, have still tried to win her, in

order that he might have the handling of her dowry for the good of The Cause; as it was, inclination and duty travelled for once in the same direction, and for a couple of months the belated hunter of will-o'-the-wisps lived in a fool's paradise.

Penhala's next-door neighbour in London, Lady Glenhaggart of Glenhaggart, was the first person to scent the danger, when she came up to town at the beginning of March. And perhaps, but for her interference, things might have gone as Paul wished them to go. The chances are that Penhala would have offered no objection; indeed, he would probably have snatched at the arrangement as an admirable solution of the difficulty in which he found himself—for he had never told his nephew the truth concerning Ellaline's parentage.

Lady Glenhaggart, however, had views of her own concerning Mr. Penhala's only daughter and heiress, and when Lady Glenhaggart had once formed a plan, she had a habit of carrying it through, and the more difficulties threatened it the more obstinate her ladyship became.

To say that she was disconcerted, when she came to town and found this remarkable looking man domiciled in the Penhala family circle, would be to considerably understate her feelings on the point. The Russian was not handsome, certainly, but there was a something quite indescribable about him—an air of having done great things, and of having endured unmerited hardships—which might be far more dangerous with a girl of Ellaline's impulsive disposition, than all the straight noses and bewitching smiles in the world.

After that first call on the Penhalas, Lady Glenhaggart went at once and despatched an urgent telegram to her son—not the late Lord Glenhaggart's son, but her son by her first husband, George Pinto the stock-broker—requesting his immediate return to England, on account of the state of her health.

Fitzwarrene Pinto was at Monte Carlo at the time, enjoying himself hugely, but he started off at once on receipt of his mother's telegram, for he was old-fashioned enough to nourish some little remnant of regard for the author of his being; besides which, George Pinto had left the bulk of his money to his widow unconditionally.

But he did feel he had been rather sold when he arrived home, and found his mother in her usual health.

‘It had been a heart attack,’ she told

him: 'very alarming while it lasted, but soon over. However, now he was here, he might as well stay a few days; there were already plenty of quite decent people in town, and in particular she wanted to introduce him to her next-door neighbour—Lancelot Penhala, the Cornish millionaire. He might be useful to Fitzwarrene by and by, when he took seriously to business.'

Fitzwarrene turned down the corners of his good-humoured mouth at this new fad of 'the old lady's,' and wished himself back in Monte Carlo. But on that point he altered his mind before the end of the day.

For wise Lady Glenhaggart had not so much as mentioned the Cornishman's daughter, and Fitzwarrene was taken off his guard.

Fitzwarrene did not return to Monte Carlo that spring, and Lady Glenhaggart presented Miss Penhala at the first May drawing-room, and Mr. Penhala invited Lady Glenhaggart and her son to spend the first fortnight in June at his long-deserted place in Cornwall.

Of course Petrovsky saw and understood everything; but he had by no means given up all hope even yet. He did not spend so much time in his uncle's family circle as on his first arrival, perhaps because he felt at a disadvantage in the atmosphere of Pinto's bright young gaiety, perhaps because he was finding more congenial occupation for his leisure time than purposeless dawdlings about the Eaton Square drawing-room.

An hour or two every morning he spent

with his uncle, fulfilling his so-called secretarial duties—Penhala's own scheme this, perhaps used, in his own mind, as a set-off against the injustice he was contemplating in another direction—and after that Paul's time was his own.

And as the spring advanced the Russian spent less and less of his time in civilized society, with which he had no interests in common, and more and more of it in the company of those of the like hopes and aims with himself.

Once he did certainly attempt to bespeak his uncle's sympathy on behalf of those cherished hopes and aims, but it was an attempt he never repeated. He had thrown out a feeler, in the form of a denunciation of the St. Petersburg authorities for their treatment of himself.

Penhala listened quietly till he paused, and then relieved himself of a trite truism, speaking without any touch of harshness :

‘People who play with the fire, must learn to bear their burns.’

Paul answered nothing. It was his first and last attempt to obtain sympathy for himself or his pursuits from any member of his uncle’s household.

To Ellaline he could never bring himself to touch on the subject. Devoted heart and soul as he was to The Cause himself, permeated though he was to the very core of his being with the conviction of its perfect righteousness and its ultimate triumph, he yet could see the hideous incongruity of bringing such a creature as Ellaline, all light and life and happiness, into touch with the hole-and-corner work,

the gutter-raking, the underhanded spying and prying by which alone the organisation could hope to make headway at present.

But Ellaline, with all her brightness and gaiety, was by nature observant, and she could not help wondering a little over her cousin's preoccupation, and his frequent absence from home.

She teased him a little sometimes about his tremendous secrets, and once, coming upon him stealthily in her father's study, and finding him leaning over a tiny note-book, with both hands clasped over his ears, she snatched the book from under his glance, and darted across to the window with it.

The notes were in Russian; she could not have read a word of them; but with that fear of discovery which is ingrained

in the habitual plotter against authority, he dashed across the room with his eyes ablaze, and caught her in a grip like a vice before he knew what he was doing.

She went pale at his look, and shrank up into the corner of the window-seat in very evident fright; palpitating in his clutch like a bird who finds itself for the first time in the hold of its enemy, man.

When he had restored the book to the safety of an inner pocket, and lifted his eyes again to hers, she was still regarding him in a kind of breathless, piteous bewilderment, as if she were uncertain of his identity; for indeed it seemed to her that she had never seen this infuriated creature with eyes of flame before.

The shrinking horror of her look shocked him and shook his self-posses-

sion ; and her lovely, frightened little face was quite close to his own, and his hand was still round her ; her heart was beating wildly under the pressure of his fingers, and all the untamed Tartar blood that was in him rushed in a mad wave to his head and outdid him.

‘ For God’s sake, child, don’t look at me like that!’ he cried, in a half-strangled whisper. ‘ Do you think I would harm you? Don’t you know, my little pearl, my sweet, dainty blossom, that I love you with every drop of my blood, every beat of my heart!—love you more than everything in heaven and earth put together? Why, Ellaline, I would give my life to save you one hour of sorrow! Do you think, then, that I would hurt you?’

But she had been too genuinely scared

to be easily re-assured, and in any case such fervid love-making as this was hardly the sort of thing to calm her.

‘You frighten me!’ she gasped. ‘You frighten me horribly. Let me go, Paul! I—I think you are mad. You look dreadful. Oh, pray, pray let me go! I will never play you a trick again.’

The child-like speech recalled him to himself a little. He loosened his hold and straightened himself, and laughed, with a miserable consciousness of having gone too far.

‘My darling, I ask your pardon,’ he said, very humbly. ‘From my heart I ask it, for having shocked you with my savagery. I should have been more gentle. English ladies are not accustomed to such displays of emotion. When an Englishman tells a girl he loves her, he is careful

above all to do nothing that shall make him ridiculous in her eyes. We barbarians, with Asiatic blood in our veins—we are different; our feelings run away with us a little more, but they are none the less real on that account. Perhaps I should not have said this to you, Ellaline, until I had first spoken to your father—I am sure I should not—but there it is, you see—it is done, and nothing can now undo it. You have surprised my secret from me, and it is my secret no longer. Do you think you could ever love me a little, Ellaline? I would not be exacting, my darling, I would try to be satisfied with what you could give me.'

He had completely recovered his self-control now; so completely that Ellaline felt as if there was something unreal about the mad outburst of a minute ago, as if it had

only occurred in her imagination. She had been so horribly frightened, that she scarcely realised it was an offer of marriage she was receiving; there certainly was none of the usual bashful consciousness about her manner as she made her answer.

‘But I don’t love you, cousin Paul, not like that, you know—I never should, I’m sure of it—and—I don’t think we should suit one another—I like fun and—and—nonsense of all kinds, and you are so grave and quiet. Oh, I am sure I should be very unhappy as your wife; but I’m sorry as sorry can be, if you are disappointed. You see, I couldn’t be expected to know, could I?’

She got up with a little smile, which seemed to hint that the interview was over, and he crossed to the door as if to

open it, and then waited with his hand on the handle for a last word.

‘It is just as I expected,’ he said, speaking with such a curious calmness all about him that he almost gave one the impression of a person speaking in his sleep; ‘and as for giving a thought of reproach to you, that is senseless folly—and yet——’

Ellaline waited, expectant of she hardly knew what. He did not look at her, his eyes were fixed on the bow of ribbon at her waist, and she formed a strange fancy that he was longing above everything to look her straight in the face, but was afraid lest she should discover that which he was bound to keep hid. ‘And yet, Ellaline—’ the words came at last with an effort—‘I wish with all my heart and soul I could induce you to alter your decision. It is not

only myself I am thinking of, dear—I am not even thinking most of myself, but of you. You would be so safe with me, dearest—I would guard and cherish you, so that no breath of danger should ever find its way into your presence—I would fend you round and round with my love till it stood as an impregnable wall between you and harm.'

'But, cousin Paul,' put in Ellaline, gently, 'there is nothing of that sort to guard against—here—in happy old England. You are thinking of the dangers you have gone through yourself. Nothing of that kind will ever come near me, you know.'

Then for an instant he lifted his eyes, and she felt as if blinded by a flash of vivid light. But his glance moved on again, away from her, before she could

grasp its meaning—she only knew that it was full of significance, but *what* it signified she could not grasp. He opened the door without further parley, and put out his hand with a slow smile as she passed.

‘We shall be friends still, Ella, you and I? Because you cannot give me the loveliest blossom in your garden, that is no reason why I should not be allowed to gather a few of the humbler kinds, eh? Friendship and cousinly regard, and so on?’

She tried to assure him on this point, but the wistfulness of his smile was too much for her, and gripping his hand with all her little might in token of assent, she sprang past him and rushed away up the stairs, just as if she feared he might try to overtake her.

On the landing half-way up she waited, with both hands pressed to her heart, trying to shake off the curious, bodeful feeling he had left on her mind, in perfect unconsciousness of the astonished observation of a gentleman from the landing above.

‘ Oh, I say, Miss Penhala,’ he began ; and Ellaline, looking up and meeting his round-eyed stare of dismay, burst out laughing, and then, without a moment’s interval, threw her hands up to her face and began to cry.

But that was too much for the observer from above. In a couple of springs he was with her, holding her up, and endeavouring to wipe her tears with his handkerchief.

‘ What on earth has upset you like this ?’ he asked, in deep concern. ‘ To think you should have been put out like this to-day of all days—when I was coming in such

jolly spirits to tell you that I have talked the elders over after all. The mater has consented to go to the Oaks at last, and I'm off now to make the arrangements about going down. Come upstairs now and talk it over. I've been trying to persuade Mrs. Smith to go, but she says it's right out of her line ; perhaps you'll have better luck. I say, what was it bowled you over like that ? Tell me all about it, won't you ?'

But that was just what Ellaline was not at all likely to do. She was too genuinely sorry for Paul to think of betraying him, least of all to this happy, heedless, delightful young man, who was so busy enjoying himself and helping forward the enjoyment of others, that it would have seemed an incongruity to ask his sympathy for Paul Petrovsky's heart-ache.

But she told her father all about it, and he in turn spoke to Paul, and was very good and sympathetic over it.

‘ And while we are talking seriously,’ he continued, after he had expressed his sorrow for Paul’s disappointment, ‘ I should like you to know that I have put you down for a legacy in my will, Paul. Ellaline is my heiress of course,’ his glance fell away a little from his nephew’s face as he made this admission, ‘ but since your return to the land of the living I have made an addition to my will, by which you will come in for twenty-five thousand on my death. I wish I could think it would be of the least use to give you a word of advice as to the spending of it, but I know your breed too well.’

Paul smiled slightly.

‘ Ellaline will be a catch for our young

friend,' he said, quietly passing over the other insinuation.

'Something of one—yes. Lady Glenhaggart knew what she was about when she threw them together. But I don't grumble. So long as the child is happy, my chief aim will be gained.'

'Are things settled yet?' asked Paul.

'Scarcely—but there is no doubt as to how they will go. This visit to Cornwall has been arranged on purpose to get them out of the endless hubbub of town for a few days. You will come down with us, Paul? There is to be a couple of big dinners during our stay. I should like you to be there—my only male relative, you know.'

Paul looked irresolute and said nothing, until he caught a sympathetic glance across the table.

'Oh no, it is not that,' he said then. 'I

am not a boy, to wear my heart on my sleeve, and I would as soon be with you at Carn Ruth as elsewhere—sooner; but—the fact is—the fact is, Uncle Lance, there are things which might keep me in town—at any rate, I would rather not give you a definite answer for a day or two.’

Penhala shook his head a little as he rose from the table. He was inclined to repeat his saying about playing with fire, but felt that his interference was hardly justified in the face of Paul’s determined silence. And his advice would be only so much wasted breath—he had spoken truly, he ‘knew the breed.’

There was the usual kaleidoscopic collection of humanity on Epsom downs that year on the last Friday in May; perhaps

the collection stretched a little further and was a little more kaleidoscopic in character even than usual, for the weather was brighter and warmer than the English sporting world is usually favoured with at this particular meeting.

Ellaline was in raptures of delight over the whole thing; Penhala, happy in seeing her happiness, was enjoying himself like a school-boy; Fitzwarrene was in the maddest spirits, and Lady Glenhaggart languidly satisfied with her surroundings. In the next carriage but one two daughters of a duke were shouting over the finishes, and playing practical jokes with as much gusto as any costermonger's girl on the downs; but Lady Glenhaggart was careful never to let animation exceed the bounds of dignity. Those girls could afford to be vulgar; there was no weak point in their

position ; they were not under the necessity—as she was—of keeping their guard for ever up.

The afternoon was well on when Ellaline's glance was caught by a man going along inside the ropes, with a small portable table carried over his shoulder. He glanced up as he came level with the carriage and met her gaze, full. Instinctively, as it seemed, his hand went up to his high dunce's cap of red paper—he was got up *à la* Katerfelto, in the conical cap and robe of the wizard of the middle-ages—and he gave her a quick smile and bow.

‘Homage to beauty,’ murmured Fitzwarrene.

‘Don't be silly,’ said Ellaline, blushing a little. ‘I wonder what he does, Mr. Pinto?’

‘Juggling, sleight of hand, card tricks,’

answered Fitz. 'Jolly clever he is at it too ; I saw him at Ascot last year.'

'Quite a picturesque fellow, isn't he ?' said Penhala. 'Is the long hair and flowing beard his own, do you think ?'

'We'll see,' said Fitz, hailing him. 'Would you like to see what he can do, Miss Penhala ?'

Penhala turned at the moment to answer a remark of Lady Glenhaggart's, and it happened that he did not face to the course again, until Katerfelto had formed a little ring for himself, and set up his performing table.

That performance of the wayside wizard's was a little bit out of the usual run of such things. The rough and ready audience of a race-course, is one of the last assemblages in which one would look for those sympathetic individualities which

are sensitive to the emotions of others, and yet there were some, even among the crowd surrounding him, who were conscious that this wandering vagabond, with the restless glance, and the flashing smile, and the nimble fingers, was going through the routine of his daily trickery under the stress of an overwhelming agitation. Ellaline, in particular, was curiously impressed by the man and his manner, more especially when he took advantage of the first bell, presently, to shut up his table with the rapidity of lightning, and dart away into the concealment of the crowd, without soliciting anything in return for his exhibition.

‘How odd!’ she said, standing up to watch which way he went. ‘I thought there was something a little unusual about him from the first. Did you see how his

hands shook when he started? I thought he was going to faint.'

'Drink!' said Fitz, sententiously.

'Fear of the police, perhaps,' suggested Penhala. 'These fellows are utter blackguards, most of them. I daresay his fingers are as clever in finding their way into other people's pockets as they are at palming a card. Perhaps he saw a detective watching him.'

'He wasn't up to his usual form, anyway,' declared Fitz. 'He did the whole business in dumb show to-day—as a rule he talks the whole time, and talks well too.'

'Pooh, pooh! leave the man alone,' said Penhala, with a touch of petulance very rare indeed with him. 'I'm glad he's gone. If there is one thing I hate above another it is tricks with cards.'

The subject was dropped at once, but Ellaline shot an enquiring glance at her father, as if she found his impatience a little difficult of comprehension.

Katerfelto did not do much more business that afternoon. Ellaline's quick eyes had not deceived her—his hands did shake. By a supreme effort of will he had steadied the treacherous tremor during the few minutes he stood there, with Lancelot Penhala's quiet eyes upon him ; but his hardly won self-control deserted him as soon as the ordeal of facing that calm glance was over. The shaking returned ; his quickness of touch failed him in the middle of one of his simplest tricks, and his audience hooted him.

At the end of that performance he took off his paper cap, and crushed it up and threw it away, replacing it by a soft felt

hat from his pocket; and, pulling off his robe of magic, he turned it inside out and threw it over his shoulder. He would do no more that day. He had had a shock; he needed a steadying touch.

He went off to one of the bars and had some brandy, and then made his way back to the course, and moved up with the stream again, in the direction of the Penhala carriage. He did not want to go, he was conscious of a very strong disinclination to go, and yet a fascination stronger than his own will drew him on.

Twenty-two years since he and Lancelot Penhala had last stood face to face, and in all those years the elder man had not changed so much as this battered, hard-drinking Katerfelto had in the first five of the separation. A strange sensation it had been to find himself, without a mo-

ment of warning, standing almost eye to eye with the handsome, stalwart Cornishman again; a sensation in which he knew not what emotion came uppermost—joy, sorrow, fear, pleasure, which was it?

That perhaps was what he was going back for, to settle the point to his own satisfaction.

He saw the carriage some time before he reached it, and he managed, with a little contriving, to get next to the rails as he drew near. As he came level he pulled up altogether, and, slipping under the rail, leant his arms on it and stood thus, with his shoulders hunched up and his face to the course, within reach of the voices from the carriage. His hat hid his flowing locks from the view of the people behind him; for the rest, there was nothing

especially conspicuous in his appearance to excite remark.

The brandy—he had taken a large dose—had subdued whatever there was of fear in the condition of his mind, and as he leant there, in the warm May sunshine, amid the hum and roar and clatter of the huge charivari, a curious thing happened to him—he had a dream.

He dreamed he was in the garden of a picturesque Sussex cottage, copying music in the shadow of a graceful acacia-tree. All around him there was that somniferous stillness, which denotes that Nature's working time is past, and her in-gathering is at hand. The very hum of the bees had a drowsiness about it—he certainly was very nearly asleep, when such a babel as this around him only reached his senses as the drowsy humming of the bees—and

the leaves on the trees hung still and heavy in their full ripeness, as if they knew that the time was at hand when movement might be dangerous to their continued existence, and were taking lessons in immovability as a precautionary measure.

He did not know how long he had been sitting there in the hushed stillness of that quiet garden, when he heard a voice speaking to him. All the dream, except the voice itself, was so intangible, so filmy in composition, that perhaps it was really the voice which called the whole vision into being. This point he could not argue, for imagination had him in her grip; and when imagination occupies the ground reason cannot enter. What the voice said, speaking very sweetly and gently, was this :

‘We all make mistakes; every one of us. Because you have made mistakes in your past, is that any reason why you should never do better in the future?’

Those were the words that brought the dream to the man leaning over the rail. Almost the same words, *in the same voice*, had been said to him many a sin-stained year ago, in the beautiful silence of that retired Sussex garden.

And then the dream played him false, for the answer came in a voice which awoke no echoes in the sounding vaults of his memory, and at a breath the vision of the still garden, with a girl in a white cotton frock and a blue waist ribbon, standing in the shadow of the acacia-tree, vanished back into the past whence it had come, and he was awake to his surroundings again.

And yet, was he awake? There was the voice again—the same voice, only gayer now.

‘Oh, Mr. Pinto,’ it said, ‘don’t let us be serious to-day! We will be as solemn as ever you like when we are in the country next week—but to-day it would be such a waste of fun and sunshine to be serious.’

Katerfelto lifted his arms from the rail and moved away to a little distance, pushing himself in among the thickly packed carriages until there were one or two between him and the one he had just left. Then, and then only, he raised his head, and, with the air of one who braces himself to receive a shock, took a steady look at the people he had been playing the eaves-dropper to.

They were quite young people—a man and a woman—a boy and a girl would perhaps be nearer the mark. Nobody else was on the carriage with them at the moment, and he—the boy—had evidently been utilising the *solitude à deux* to his own ends.

Katerfelto drew a big breath—like a man who is released from some hideous spell—as he took in the details of the girl's appearance. Perhaps he had expected to see a girl with a clear, pale skin, and masses of dark, glistening hair, and steadfast gray eyes looking out from under well-marked brows.

What he did see was a dainty maiden, all white lace and pale puce ribbons, a maiden with dancing brown eyes and rippling chestnut hair, with a skin of the

purest pink and white, and dimpled cheeks, and a mouth like a rosebud for beauty, and smiles, and sweetness. Certainly there was no suggestion of the face he was recalling about this embodiment of sunshine, and yet, as he looked, his brows drew themselves together in perplexity, for it seemed to him there was some touch of familiarity in the little creature's loveliness.

The carriage he was leaning against was vacant but for the servant on the box; left in charge of the baskets and wraps. He waited there, just for want of something else to do, watching the pretty child and her handsome young lover. And presently he went nearer again, and deliberately listened to what they were saying.

‘I’m not a bit tired of all the fun, you know,’ said the girl, brightly; ‘but I would give up the whole season willingly, rather than lose this visit to Cornwall. I have been building on it so long.’

The young man followed her lead with a touch of resignation in his good-tempered voice.

‘It seems so queer to think that you are going to see the place for the first time as well as us.’

‘Penhala’s house, you mean? Yes, doesn’t it? You don’t know how excited I am about it all.’

‘And it seems queerer still to think of Mr. Penhala himself having been away from his own place for all these years.’

‘I think there is more in that than you or I quite understand,’ answered the

pretty voice again, a little lowered this time. 'I think the associations of the place are very sad. My mother died there, you know.'

A sudden vivid comprehension flashed into the face of the listening man. Lancelot Penhala had married again, and this was the daughter of the second marriage. That accounted for much—ay, for much, but not for quite all. The voice? How came this child with the voice of that other one?

Penhala came back presently, escorting the splendidly dressed woman whom Katerfelto had seen in the carriage before. The strolling conjurer moved away as they came. He no longer felt drawn to Penhala's presence as he had done; his thoughts had received a new impetus.

They—Penhala and a party of friends—were going down to Cornwall next week. Strange how sudden is the birth of a desire in the human heart! Half-an-hour ago this wandering outcast had been conscious of no deeper yearning in all his empty life than ‘A good pitch, a full pocket, and enough drink to send him to sleep when the time for sleep came.’ Now his heart was conscious of a sudden new desire—a desire so intense and vivid, that at its touch all other aims and objects faded into absolute nothingness. He too would like to see Penhala’s house again after all these years!

Until he had heard the delight in the girl’s voice, as she spoke of going there, he had not had a suspicion that to him, too, it would be a delight to see the beau-

tiful old place again. And yet, now that the idea had once been presented to his mind, it had got such hold of him, that merely to think of it set his heart beating with a thousand emotions—emotions which he had imagined were long since dead within him.

Just in the five minutes he had stood listening to that pleasant chatter, all the world had changed for him.

The murky London slums, and the rowdy associates, and the reek of the flaring tap-room no longer formed the horizon of his desires. They stretched far far away across the extremest breadth of the land, to where the gargantuan masses of the Cornish cliffs frowned loftily down at the unceasing fretting of the wide Atlantic waters.

So far stretched his desires. But he

was a man of wax. Would he conquer the difficulties in his road, and carry them out?

CHAPTER III.

THE SON OF HIS FATHER.

PAUL PETROVSKY did not travel down to Cornwall with his uncle's party. He had intended to till late on the evening preceding their departure, and then something happened to interfere with his plans.

By the last post he received a letter, informing him of the arrival in England of a person whom he had not seen since he was a little lad of ten, running about

the Continent from one revolutionary centre to another in the train of his father. The mere sight of this personage's name, or rather the sight of the pseudonym which stood for his name—for neither things nor people were often called by their real names between Petrovsky and his fellow-workers—gave the young man something of a shock. Amongst all that band of devoted, self-sacrificing labourers, this especial personage stood pre-eminent for self-sacrifice and devotion to the good of the confederacy. Indeed, there were those amongst the most single-minded of its adherents who would have called his fervour fanaticism, if it had been turned in any other direction. As it was, even while they revered him as one of the saviours of The Cause, there was perhaps a dash of fear in the composition of their

reverence. It was true that wherever he went, there the movement made most progress, but there, also, it was conducted with the most headlong disregard for the scruples of the more tender-hearted, the most implacable ferocity against the enemies of the organisation. Mercy had no meaning for him when rigour told for the good of The Cause, scruples had no existence in his mental retina, when they meant hesitation to use any means that offered to the one end.

Perhaps it was hardly to be wondered at that Petrovsky's heart should sink with a touch of foreboding, when he learnt that 'Ivan Leipold' was to arrive in London that night, and had requested that an interview with Petrovsky should be arranged for him as soon as possible upon his arrival.

And so it happened that Paul contrived to lose his train on the morning of the start for Cornwall, being at the moment engaged in conversation of a deeply absorbing nature, in the garden of Leicester Square, with Ivan Leipold.

‘We can better guard against listeners in the open air,’ Leipold had said. ‘Though on the other hand it would be as well we should go where we are least likely to meet personal acquaintances of yours, my son, for I am going to engage you in one of the perilous missions of our Cause, and when one sets out on a dangerous road, one should guard against risks from the outset.’

Paul bent his head with a murmured—
‘I am ready, my father,’ and led the way to the most likely spot he could think of—the inclosure in Leicester Square.

For an hour they paced slowly round the grass, and still the conversation went on without pause or hindrance.

Leipold did most of the talking, always speaking quick and low, with an impressive intensity in his subdued voice; the voice of one who recognised the difficulty of the task in hand, and was bringing the full power of his intellect to its accomplishment. He carried his arms behind him, his shoulders thrown forward, and his head bent in the attitude of one who thinks deeply as he walks; but now and again, as he sought to drive home some point in the discussion, his face would lift and his eyes flash round on his companion with an air of insistance, which seemed to put all argument out of the question.

Not that Paul offered argument—that virtue at least these enemies of the Czar

possess in perfection—submission to those who are by their own choice in authority over them. And this point is almost enough in itself to induce some belief in the actuality of the wrongs which have made anarchists and renegades of people capable of such a sublime obedience to a self-constituted authority.

And Paul Petrovsky was least of all likely to offer opposition to the fiat of his fellow-labourers, for, apart from his revolutionary upbringings, there were his own private wrongs to be redressed.

‘This want of money has been our curse from the very beginning,’ said Leopold. ‘If we could borrow the wand of a magician for one minute, and transport the Bank of England, entire, into the midst of our poorest province, and keep it there to use for our own ends, I tell you, my

son, that those ends would be gained before the money was exhausted. We always get thus far in our projects, at the cost of a heroism and a devotion unsurpassed, if not unparalleled in the history of any political movement the world has knowledge of; and then, when these noble hearts are broken, this brave blood spilt, there comes a crisis in the financial working of the scheme; and the whole thing fails for the lack of a few paltry thousands, which one of our oppressors would lose in play at a sitting. When I heard of your matrimonial scheme, my son, I thought the sun had dawned at last on a day of prosperity for us.'

Paul said nothing.

'It would have been such a perfectly legitimate manner of reaching your uncle's wealth. Still, if one only used legitimate

means—' a faint shrug of the shoulder completed that portion of the sentence. ' And now that those means have failed us, we must find others.'

Still Paul did not speak ; but his prominent brows came a little closer, and the muscles of his mouth *stiffened up* for an instant, as when one experiences an internal agony and strives to suppress all visible symptoms of suffering.

' You are absolutely certain on the subject of this money ?'

' Absolutely.'

To the direct question he answered promptly and emphatically.

' A quarter of a million sterling you say, *at the least ?*'

' At the least.'

' Probably more ?'

' Most probably.'

It was curious how the words slipped over his lips: clear, sharp, unhesitating, but short to curtness; as if his words were precious, and he would not waste one. Or was it that his self-command was limited, and he would not waste that?

‘It is a large sum.’

No answer this time, the assertion needing none.

‘In the hands of a faithful supporter of The Cause, it would be of incalculable benefit to us.’

Still no response, and Leipold gives one of those flashing glances round at his companion’s stony face as he says,

‘It must come into the hands of such a one, my son.’

Paul lifts his hat, bends his head slightly and murmurs,

‘My father has said it.’

‘Good!’ returns Leipold, and the word sounds like the closing of a door which shuts off all escape.

For perhaps half a minute they are silent, a silence which serves to intensify the meaning of what has gone before. Then Leipold starts again, his voice a note lower than before, a note more intense.

‘I have the full particulars? There is nobody between you and the heirship to your uncle’s wealth but this one girl?’

As he thus comes to details, the face of his companion settles into the tinge and stillness of a stone image, the lips scarce move as he answers,

‘Nobody, but this one girl.’

‘With her out of the way, you are bound to succeed to this money?’

‘ Provided my uncle died intestate, every farthing of it.’

‘ Then he must die intestate.’

A sound that is more a strangled sigh than a moan comes from Petrovsky’s closed lips; and slight as it is Leipold hears it. Without looking up he says, quietly,

‘ Are you not the son of your father?’

Paul raises his head and draws the warm June air in through his distended nostrils, breathing hard and short. If he parted his lips he would cry out.

‘ It has been said to me of you that you were one eager to win distinction on the battle-fields of our rights—that you thirsted to perform some service of difficulty or danger.’

Then for an instant Petrovsky’s iron

self-repression gives way, and his heart leaps to his lips.

‘Open danger? Ah, yes! But to stab in the dark! To rend the hand that has caressed you! To pit your strength and cunning against a fragile girl, a gentle old man! O God! O God! O God!’

Very terrible the outburst is, and all the more terrible because of its quietness; for, even in the bitterness of that awful moment, he is true to his past training, and does not betray his emotion by any sign visible to the ordinary observer.

‘And the good of The Cause?’ begins the low, intense voice again . . . ‘And your oath . . . Paul, the son of Stanislaus Kurtz, are you indeed the son of your father?’

Paul glances round the enclosure, at the

garnish ornamentation of the playhouses in the square outside the railings, at the tired people on the seats inside, and up at the smoke-dimmed sun above the house-tops. Just such a look round as one of the damned might give, as he stood waiting for admission at the portal of the city of Dis. Then he lifts his hat again and says, cold, and still, and lifeless,

‘My father has said it.’

And Leipold answers as before: ‘Good!’ Perhaps, now that the battle is over, some touch of compassion for the misery of the man at his side reaches his consciousness, for instead of plunging at once into the business details which Paul, with every nerve on the stretch, is expecting, he touches on the other side of the argument—the glory of aiding the great purpose, no matter what the means used.

‘And it is a patron that is satisfied with no half-hearted service, my son—this Cause we serve. It is not enough that you sacrifice your ambition, your health, your love,’ here he makes an almost imperceptible pause, ‘your life in its service; you must be prepared to sacrifice your conscience, your honour, your peace of mind—all must go at its demand—body and soul you offer to it, and body and soul it claims—sometimes. And the more it accepts the greater the honour to the giver.’

‘I am a machine in your hands, my father—put me to what use you will.’

‘The misfortune is that we cannot choose the form of our service. Now you, who would die gladly ten times over for The Cause, you are the one who must live for it—that is one of the main points I would urge upon you. If you perform this busi-

ness so clumsily that suspicion falls upon you, it will be so much wasted effort on your part. Success, perfect and complete, will be the only excuse for the measures we are taking. Therefore it is necessary that you should come into possession of this money, without creating a suspicion against you in anybody's mind. Therefore we must use every precaution in removing the obstacles from our path—therefore we must go patiently—six months at least must lapse between the two—catastrophes. There are cliffs—there—where they have gone to? Dangerous neighbourhoods those, with cliffs. And high ones too, I am told. No chance of an escape with a broken limb if one should happen to slip over an edge. Still there is a certain ghastliness about a fall from a cliff. I have here—I brought them with me—some

rather rare bon-bons. Will you take charge of them for me? Be careful where you leave them. Anyone taking one by mistake might come to harm. An hour's stupor—painless as an infant's sleep—and a sudden failure in the action of the heart. You will be careful with them? They are so small, so innocent in appearance, and so deadly. Once administered, there is no antidote to their action. And how simple to drop one into a glass of wine, or a cup of coffee, as you hand it to—the chosen person. I was imagining a bijou drama last night as I crossed from Calais—A country walk; a glass of milk at a wayside cottage; the man fetches it himself and carries it to the girl—his cousin—and on his way he contrives for one brief instant to place himself so that the action of his other hand, the hand

without the glass, is hidden from the people in the cottage and the girl waiting in the road ; the continuation of the walk along the cliffs ; the unconquerable drowsiness of the girl ; the rest on the grass ; the senseless form at the man's feet,—quite senseless, mark you, unconscious of all sensation whatever,—the quick removal of that senseless form to the edge, and—over. The return of the man alone ; the enquiry at the cottage, “Has the lady gone by this way? I left her on the cliff while I extended my walk, but I understood she was to wait for me. However, I suppose she has gone on home.” The discovery of the body. So evidently an accident that internal examination is never thought of, never hinted at. *Et voila !*

Paul has taken the minute box, and placed it in an inner pocket. When

Leipold ceases he is breathing hard again, with his lips folded close one on the other, but he makes no further protest. He has said his say—he is ‘a machine in their hands.’ Individual feelings and scruples have no place in the economy of the confederacy; if they exist they must be obliterated, even if they refuse to vanish until the hot iron of an anguish unspeakable has burnt them out, and left its own sear on the heart instead.

They stop now and face one another—the short, broad-built man in the shabby hat and the iron-grey beard, and the well-dressed man with the face of stone.

‘There is nothing more you wish to ask?’ queries the one.

‘Nothing my father,’ answers the other, automatically.

Leipold fixes his eye for an instant on

the rigid face opposite him, but it does not falter nor quiver under the inspection, and the glance meets his unflinchingly, albeit without animation. The examination satisfies him evidently, for he mutters a short decisive, 'It is well!' and making a sudden flash through the air with both hands—a sign which the other returns by instinct—he turns sharp round and walks away in the direction of Soho; leaving Paul alone, amid the pale-faced children and the squalid loungers in the city garden.

It was nearly eleven when Paul's hired carriage turned in at the gates of the east lodge, and rolled quietly up the curving drive, across the pretty stone bridge—under which the river babbled its peaceful summer song—through the long stretch of

pine plantations, and into view of the house.

There was a full moon overhead, and as his tired glance first fell on the long low irregular white buildings, reposing there so peacefully in the soft pale light, a sudden impulse fell on him to turn back, and leave all there peaceful as he found it, to take the country walk of Leipold's description by himself, there and then, and let his misery end with himself.

‘Are you indeed the son of your father? And the good of The Cause? Has that no weight with you?’

The words were weaving themselves in among the rustle of the pine needles behind him, setting themselves to the slow whirr of the wheels under him. There was no turning back for him now, none!

He pulled his hat a little lower over his

eyes as he came into the light of the porch, almost as if he shrank from the glance of the man who stood at the door—one of the London servants who had come down with the family that day.

‘The ladies had gone to their rooms,’ he informed him; ‘being a little tired with the long journey. The gentlemen’—Penhala had brought quite a party down with him—‘were still in the smoke-room. Would Mr. Petrovsky like to go to his room at once, or should he show him the way to the smoke-room?’

Paul smiled a little as he answered him that he did not need his guidance, he knew his way about the house well enough.

But he did not go directly to the smoke-room. He stood there at the entrance to the porch, just where the moonlight from without and the lamplight from within

met, and fought each other for supremacy. He could still hear the wheels of his departing carriage stealing from the distance across the silence of the summer night. He wished the sound would cease; and yet he could not help straining his ears for the last repetition of the terrible question, 'Are you indeed the son of your father?'

He strode away presently, out into the night. He was not in the mood for smoke-room chatter. He would go round to the south front and listen to the song of the tide, and smoke a cigarette on the terrace, and steady his nerves a little after the rattle of the ten hours' journey, before turning in.

All the sitting-rooms, bar the smoke and billiard-rooms, faced on to this southern terrace, and as he mounted the steps

from the smooth grass slope he saw that the lights in the drawing-room were not yet extinguished. Perhaps some of the ladies were still up. He shrank back a little at the thought. He was not fit, either mentally or outwardly, to present himself before his uncle's lady-guests.

As he stood there hesitating, a woman with a white cap on her head passed one of the open windows, and began to put out the candles in the branch against the wall. The next instant he heard Parsons' voice inside the room, speaking in the easy tone of one addressing an equal. The servants evidently had the room to themselves.

Re-assured, Paul leant his arms on the stone balustrade, and let his thoughts go wandering.

This was the very place where he had

waited for his father once, during his first visit to England. He had been out yachting with John, and they had come home in the early morning, and his father had met them at the top of the cliff steps yonder, and taken John off into the plantations for a talk. He remembered that John had gone off to London with his father the very next day, and it came to him now, like a sudden flash of light, that it was during that London visit of John's that the sham marriage between him and little Hagar Polwhele had been got up. Was that also his father's doing then? Was that mock marriage a part of his design for separating father and son, in order that the way might be left clear for Paul to inherit? There could be no doubt of it—none whatever. Well, it had been a clever scheme, carefully

planned, and well carried out. But what had it ended in?

Failure, utter and complete! And this one—would it succeed any better?

Parsons, inside the room, was talking about old times with Mrs. Quickly—the housekeeper who had had charge of the place during the seventeen years' absence of its master. Naturally they had a great deal to say to each other, those two fellow-servants, after such a long separation. Parsons had originally sought the housekeeper out to ask for a more comfortable arm-chair for his master's dressing-room, and now that they were once there, alone, with no chance of an interruption, they were finding plenty to talk about. For some time their conversation was exclusively of the long-lost John Penhala; of his complete disap-

pearance, and his father's repudiation of him.

The man outside on the terrace, wrapped in his own thoughts, heard them without heeding, until Ellaline's name struck his ear and caught his attention—then he began to listen.

'And what do you think of our Miss Ellaline now?' asked Parsons, proudly.

'Why, I think she's grown up a regular beauty,' returned Mrs. Quickly, with enthusiasm. 'I don't wonder that the master should be so fond and proud of her. Is it true, what the servants are saying, Mr. Parsons, about a match between her and Lady Glenhaggart's son?'

'Well,' said Parsons, with a touch of pleasant waggery, 'the master hasn't said to me in so many words, "Parsons, my man, we are thinking of making a match

between young Pinto and my daughter; I hope it has your approval." But, all the same, I think there's no sort of doubt on the matter, Mrs. Quickly.'

'Well, but isn't it a little bit queer?' asked the housekeeper, with a touch of mystery in her tone.

'Queer? What do you mean by queer?' came the puzzled rejoinder.

'Why, this Lady Glenhaggart, from the talk of her maid, and from her own style and manner too, seems to be one of your regular high and mighty ones.'

'Father a city man,' observed Parsons, drily; 'first husband ditto. Lord Glenhaggart married her for her money, and now she's trying all her time to live up to the title. That sort is always the same. What's that got to do with Miss Ellaline?'

'Oh, well, that may make a difference,

to be sure, if she's no great shakes herself on the score of birth. I was wondering, you know, if she was "a stickler for blood"—as that fool of a girl put it at tea-time—how it was she allowed her son to engage himself to a girl that nobody in the wide world knows anything about. Because, you know, Parsons, in spite of her pretty face and sweet ways—yes, and in spite, too, of all the money that I suppose the master will leave her—she's but a foundling, after all, and there's some people wouldn't have a nameless foundling in their family, not if she was hung with Kho-i-noors from the crown of her head to her toe-tips. Why, who knows what her father may be?—a pickpocket, for aught we know to the——'

'Hold hard!' put in Parsons, suddenly.
'What's the good of saying that sort of

thing? It's a fact, Mrs. Quickly, that I've had my own thoughts about that part of the business, since I saw which way the cat was going to jump with young Pinto. I can't settle it in my own mind whether the master has told her ladyship the truth about Miss Ellaline or not. I believe he forgets half his time, himself, that she isn't really his very own daughter. He couldn't love her more if she was, that's certain. Has the mother never made a sign all these years? Sometimes, I've thought that was what kept the master away so long—the fear that the mother might turn up and want to claim the child.'

'No; the poor soul has never been heard of again. She promised Mr. Penhala she never would interfere, and she never has. Like as not she's dead.'

‘Like as not. Let me see, her name was Smith, wasn’t it?’

‘She called herself Smith down here, poor soul; but who’s to know who or what she really was? Not even Mrs. Polwhele ever got a word from her about herself or her family, although she was nearly three months in her house.’

‘Ah, well, Smith’s a common name enough, and our Mrs. Smith is a lady of the most unassailable respectability. Nice woman, isn’t she?’

‘Very; a lady all over.’

‘Rather! I say, Mrs. Quickly, I’d keep my tongue between my teeth about this affair if I was you.’

‘About Miss Ellaline, do you mean? Good gracious, yes! What do you take me for, to go meddling in the business of my betters? It’s no affair of mine; but I

don't mind telling you, Mr. Parsons, that I wouldn't like to be the one to impart the news to Lady Glenhaggart. There'll be ructions, you see if there isn't. And I shouldn't mind betting you a hat to a bonnet, that her ladyship sticks her upstart nose in the air, and puts a stop to the match in spite of everybody.'

'Not she,' said Parsons, as his voice lessened in the distance; 'she knows on which side her bread is buttered too well.'

Then there was silence, except for the frou-frou of Mrs. Quickly's silken gown as she moved about the room, and the distant murmur of the summer tide on the rocks. And Paul Petrovsky moved away from the neighbourhood of the open windows, and went down the steps and seated himself on the bottom one, and dropped his head in his hands, and tried to think

this thing out. But he could not keep his thoughts travelling steadily in one direction for long, because of the one idea that kept thundering at the gates of his understanding.

This knowledge that had come to him so opportunely, could he not use it in such a way that that other unspeakable expedient should no longer be necessary? If this information could be brought to Lady Glenhaggart's knowledge, in such a repulsive form as to lead her to insist upon Pinto throwing Ellaline over, and if he, Paul, stepped forward in the character of the lover, true through good report and evil, might not the child—for she was such a child—turn to him in the rebound? And if she married him she was saved, because then she would no longer stand between him and his money.

And it was not altogether a selfish joy that set his heart leaping at the thought. To save her he would have given his own life over and over again ; only The Cause claimed his first fealty, and The Cause commanded that he should live to inherit this wealth. And now it seemed to him that there was a possibility of attaining both objects—of his inheriting and Ellaline's escape. Yes, this fact of Ellaline's doubtful birth must be brought home to Lady Glenhaggart's knowledge in some abrupt, revolting fashion, which should set all her aristocratic tendencies up in arms, and drive her on the spot into an open repudiation of the Penhala alliance. But how to force her ladyship into this attitude of scornful reflection ? How ?

With a mind so fully occupied in reducing this particular portion of the subject

into manageable order, it was not wonderful that he left the rest of the chaos of astonishment to right itself. He gave no thought to the surprise the discovery should have caused him, he wasted no resentment on his uncle for the injustice he was contemplating, in passing over his own flesh and blood to enrich a stranger, of whom he knew less than nothing; he pinned his reasoning powers down to the one point—Would this discovery enable him to break off the marriage with Pinto, and save Ellaline?

He sat there so long, trying to feel his way out of the maze, that when he did move to go into the house, he found he was locked out; and he spent the night on the cliffs, scheming and planning, and striving with fate for the life of the girl he loved.

And once, towards morning, when the

dawn was grey in the east, and the yellow moon was dipping low towards the western sea, as he paced along the river path, in the gloom of the overhanging pines, he thought he saw, on the margin of the stream some distance ahead of him, just where a large block of rock shut in the view, a man. He could only see his head and shoulders, for the breast-high rock was between them, but that much he thought he saw distinctly. A man's head and shoulders, bent forward and supported on his arms on the top of the rock, in an attitude expressive of the deepest dejection.

Surprised to find another wanderer abroad at that unusual hour, he moved quietly on round the next bend in the path, meaning to get a nearer view of this early stroller. But when he next came

into view of the flat-topped rock there was nobody there, and he wondered a little uneasily whether there had been anyone there at all, or whether he had not been deluded by his own feverish imagination. The thought disquieted him, for, above all things, he needed steadiness of nerve, to take him safely through the ordeal to which he was pledged.

CHAPTER IV.

MUSIC HATH CHARMS THE SAVAGE BREAST
TO SOOTHE.

MRS. SMITH and Ellaline were up and out at seven o'clock on the morning after their arrival at Carn Ruth. Ellaline had been unable to sleep, because of the mad joyousness of the singing birds in the orchard in the dip below her windows, and creeping into Mrs. Smith's room, and finding her awake also, she had coaxed her into an early walk, before anybody else was about to monopolise her attention.

‘We shall never get a word with each other in the house while these people are buzzing about us,’ said the girl, as they left the sleepy street of the little fishing-town behind them, and tackled the ascent to Tregarron Head—Mrs. Smith’s choice of a walk this. ‘I was simply dying to have a chat with you last night, but I couldn’t get near you after dinner; and you looked so tired at bed-time that I hadn’t the heart to come to your room, and keep you out of your bed for hours listening to my silly chatter.’

‘For hours?’ said Mary, with a smile of enquiry. ‘Would nothing less have satisfied you?’

‘Well, I was afraid to trust myself,’ answered the pretty child, laughing and blushing, and looking beautifully happy, and just a little conscious. ‘I had such

a wonderful piece of news to tell you, and I knew when I once began I should never know when to leave off.'

Mary turned, with a stirred look in her eyes. She had known it was coming for weeks past, but all the same, now it had come, she felt as if her heart was going to be plucked out by the roots.

Ellaline slipped her hand under her arm and gave it a loving squeeze.

'Oh, gran'ma, what big eyes you've got!' she cried, with a little ripple of emotional laughter. 'Dearest, if you look at me like that I shall never be able to tell you my secret. In fact, I don't think I can tell you. I really believe I'm shy. Did you ever know before that I was shy? I didn't. But I am now, all of a sudden.' A pause and a sigh. Then—'I think, after all, Mamma Mary, you'll have to

guess what it was I wanted to tell you.'

'Is it that I am going to lose my spoilt girl, I wonder?' said Mary, trying very hard not to dim the girl's happiness by any reminder of her own heart-wrench.

'No, that indeed it is not!' declared Ellaline, with sudden vehemence. 'That was the very first thing I said to Fitz—"You won't put your back up against Mrs. Smith"—and he said—Oh, my goodness, there! I've let it out after all, you see; and you won't be sorry, will you, my darling?'

Mary stopped on the hill-side, and took the pretty, pleading, eager face between her two hands, and kissed it, twice three times, with her heart on her lips. It gave her time, and she needed it. What would her life be in the future? She pushed the

thought from her quickly, before it could cloud her face. Time enough for that by and by.

‘Sorry?’ she echoed, with scarcely a falter in her voice. ‘Sorry? Because a good, honourable man is going to make a happy woman of you? Sorry, my darling? Why, Ella, there is no one in all the world who will rejoice more than I, to know of your great happiness.’

Then Ella cried, being in that state of exaltation which can find no outlet but in tears.

‘Isn’t it stupid?’ she cried, smiling through her tears at her own folly. ‘I was never so silly before. But this love-making and nonsense seems to have altered me altogether. And yet I am happy, you know, Mamma Mary; happier than I ever

thought it was possible to be. Fitz is such a dear boy—ah! but you don't know half how nice he really is, because he never will behave as if he was in earnest about anything—not before people, I mean—but he is really, really good and true at heart; and I think he is just as strict about—things—honour and truth—“going straight,” *he* calls it—as some who make a great talk and fuss about their principles. He is going to talk things over with my father this morning. Do you think he will feel it very much, dear? Oh, it makes me feel so selfish when I think of him and you! And yet Fitz would be broken-hearted if——’

‘My darling,’ said Mary, ‘your father would not have invited Mr. Pinto and his mother to his house if he had not

been reconciled to what was going to happen.'

'Do you think he knew, then?' cried Ellaline, in startled astonishment. 'Oh, it would be such a comfort to me to think he knew all along. And yet—how could he? I did not know. I don't think he could, dear. But I hope he did. It would not come as a shock to him then.'

Mary listened, and gave her sympathy freely; but it was only a divided attention after all that she was bestowing on the pretty girlish confidences; her deeper thoughts were occupied with other matters.

This return to Carn Ruth had greatly disquieted her, as for many reasons it was inevitable it should. Would any of the townspeople recognise her?

Had Mr. Penhala weighed the chances

of Ellaline's doubtful birth coming to the knowledge of his guests, now that they were among people to whom it was no secret?

If it did come to light, what effect was it likely to have upon the superb Lady Glenhaggart?

Was there any possibility, now that she was once more on the spot, of pursuing that old idea of hers with regard to the clearing of John's name?

Anent this last question she was conscious of a touch of self-reproach. All these long years she had let the dead past bury its dead; but now that she was back here, among the scenes of that almost forgotten tragedy of John Penhala's youth, her memory of him was revived, and she felt as if she had been guilty of a disloyalty

to the dead in letting the matter rest so long. There, above them, stood the cottage where she had made her only attempt to right the wrong. As they mounted the slope, she found herself recalling the interview with Morris Edyvean's mother. The little house was closely shut. Was the old woman dead? She would be very old now; too old, perhaps, to remember Mary. Still she would rather not risk recognition.

No, it was only a divided attention she was giving to Ellaline's pretty girlish secrets. But it was quite enough for the child, in her present condition of mind, to be allowed to talk, and the stream of words flowed on without interruption, until they were past the cottage and the fir-trees, and out on the bold bluff itself,

with the soft summer breakers booming dully on the rocks five hundred feet below them.

And then something in Mary's face, as she stood there, gazing out over the sea, put a sudden thought into Ellaline's head, full just now of love and lovers as it was.

‘Little mother, I want to ask you something.’ This title was the most endearing in all Ellaline's vocabulary, but hardly warranted by circumstances ; she had only beaten Mary in the matter of inches within the last six months. ‘You are so pretty, and you look so young ; and when your husband died you must have been, oh, quite a girl ! I can't think how it is that in all these years you have never had a lover.’

Mary flushed and paled. It was as if the bandage that had covered her wound all these years had been suddenly stripped off, and shown her the hurt she had thought healed, still bleeding. She had hardly realised how faithful her heart still was to the love of her girlhood, until this shrinking distaste at Ellaline's suggestion came and enlightened her. And even while she flinched, she smiled, and put the foolishness away from her again. She to retain a glimmer of romance indeed !

‘ I buried all that sort of thing with my husband, darling,’ she said, quietly. ‘ I have forgotten the meaning of the word love, as you translate it, for as many years as you have lived. Does that seem sorrowful to you ? I don’t feel it so. I loved my husband with all the love I had in me ; I think the power to love burnt itself out

in the one effort—I don't know. I only know I have sat in the twilight—a very pleasant twilight, Ellaline—ever since. You little traitor,' she went on, smilingly, 'to entice an old woman like me into talking about her love secrets! Come, childie, we must not stop to talk about anything any longer. Look at that cloud coming up behind us. We're in for a wetting, I'm afraid.'

They had been gazing seaward, but now, as they faced inland again, they saw the clouds piling themselves up one on the other in a fashion that meant mischief. And they were nearly a mile from the town, and no shelter between them and it but the solitary cottage in the shadow of the pines!

For some occult reason Mary felt she did not wish Ellaline to go to that cottage

—perhaps because it had been the home of John Penhala's betrayer—and she set out at a run, hoping to get well past the lonely little place before the rain began. But the clouds out-raced them. The big drops were pattering down on the short, close turf before they reached the shelter of the trees, and as they came out on the land side of the plantation, it seemed as if the clouds opened and let the water down in a sheet. They dashed breathlessly towards the tiny house, and, scarcely going through the form of knocking for admission, plucked the door open and plunged into the obscurity of the interior.

For a moment they stood there panting and laughing, almost scared by the suddenness of the downpour. The darkness of the place and the rattle of the rain-drops

on the slated roof, and the squeal of the wind, as the squall tore up the hill from the valley, bewildered them, after the calm of a moment ago; and even while they laughed they drew instinctively nearer to one another, and glanced inquisitively into the gloom at the other end of their shelter.

‘Shut the door!’ cried a shrill voice from out of the shadow. ‘Do you want the roof blown from over our heads? Shut the door, I say!’

But, before they could turn to obey the command, a little figure—all tangled hair and rags it looked in that first swift glance—rushed past them and banged the door violently, leaving them in an obscurity which was nothing more than darkness made visible.

‘I’m very sorry,’ began Mary, feeling it necessary to say something; ‘but we thought the cottage was unoccupied. You will allow us to stand up till the shower is past?’

‘Stand up as long as you like,’ was the ungracious rejoinder, ‘only don’t blow sick people clean out of their beds, with your open doors in the teeth of a thunder squall.’

‘I’m very sorry. We did not know,’ said Mary again, as the irascible unknown crossed to the one small window, and drew back the heavy curtain hanging in front of it.

They could see around them a little now, and, without betraying a curiosity which might irritate their unamiable hostess, they made out that the room they

were in bore signs everywhere of a want that had long ago reached the hopeless stage—a stage at which its victims cease to make the best of things, and sit down to wallow in their misery. Just a short bench and a home-made table, and a couple of shelves with a few mutilated articles of crockery, and a rusty iron pot on the open hearth, and in the far corner a ragged curtain hung on a slackened string, from behind which there peeped the foot of a squalid bed—that was all the place held. The floor, paved with rough, unhewn slabs of slate, was bare of all covering, and the mortar had here and there broken in big patches from the walls, and left the naked outer stonework exposed to view. And, wherever this had happened, the stones seemed to

gaze upon the desolation within with a kind of reluctant shame, as if anxious to have it understood that they were not the active agents in this intrusion upon the secrets of the house.

Ella drew still closer to Mary, with a glance of commiserating horror.

‘Is the sick person very ill?’ asked Mary, gently, of the unwashed, uncombed little woman at the window, who stood with her shoulder turned forbiddingly on her unwelcome visitors. ‘You seem very isolated up here; can we do anything to help? Have you had sickness in the house long?’

‘My husband was hurt in the Cluth-hoe trouble, and he’s been abed ever since.’

From the way this information was con-

veyed, it was evident that everybody was supposed to know the date of the Cluth-hoe trouble, and Mary's next question was put rather deprecatingly.

‘And was that long ago?’

‘Well, you can't know much about Cornwall not to know that. It's turned five year since they brought him home and laid him on the bed there; and there ain't much chance that he'll ever get off it again, till he's carried off—and that day ain't so fur off, neither,’ she added, with a drop of the voice, and a glance towards the curtain in the corner, to warn her listeners that what they said might be overheard.

‘That is very terrible,’ said Mary. ‘A long sickness like that is always terrible—under any circumstances—and I'm afraid

things have not been too comfortable with you.'

'Comfortable?' echoed the shrunken-looking little creature, with the dreariest laugh in the world. 'There ain't been much comfort for Morris nor me this many a long year. But I will say he never promised me any such thing. "You'll have to rough it if you come with me, my girl," he ses, before ever we left London at all; and I have had to rough it; and I ain't grumbling, not for a minute; only when you spoke about comfort, you see, it—it made me laugh, that's all.'

'I wish you would let me help you in some way,' said Mary, her heart full of pity as she listened. 'May I send up a basket of nice little things to tempt a sick man's appetite? And a little com-

pany is cheery sometimes—if your husband would let me come and chat with him——’

But the woman put up her hand quickly for silence.

‘He can’t abear it,’ she murmured, shaking her head vehemently. ‘He won’t see a soul; and I doubt if he’d touch the food either—he’s a queer temper, and as ’aughty in his ways as if he was a king in his palace. He’s faint with hunger half his time, for he won’t go into the house, and the parish pay ain’t much, but he never grumbles, and he’s never once asked for food since he’s been on his back. It’s only by the look in his eye when I take the poor bit to him that I know what he feels. He’s got a proud spirit—I doubt if he’d eat the food of charity at all, if it

wasn't for the gnawing hunger inside him.'

Ellaline was crying a little from sheer sympathy. This was her first personal acquaintance with grinding poverty, and her tender heart was brimming over.

'I will send the basket in any case,' Mary said. 'Perhaps you will coax him into eating some of the good things, after all.'

And then there came a little sound from behind the curtain, and the woman hurried away in response to it, and left her two visitors by themselves near the window.

Ellaline was crying still, and indeed the quiet hopelessness of the woman's manner was enough to make anyone cry. Mary drew her towards the window to watch the

rain, and presently she began to sing, very softly, a setting of 'The Rainy Day.'

And Mary's voice, although she no longer sang for effect, after the fashion of an operatic *prima donna*, was exquisitely sweet and penetrant in quality. She was mindful of the nerves of the sick man, and it was scarcely more than a rivulet of sound that came from between her lips; but the tiny stream of melody wound its way in and out and about the desolate little homestead, till the whole place pulsed with its tenderness, and there was an utter stillness in the room, as if the occupants feared to miss one ripple of the heart music. And the singer appreciated the silence, and sang on to the end of her song.

'The rain is passing,' she said, present-

ly; 'we shall be home in time for breakfast after all. We won't come so far afield again without umbrellas and waterproofs. Quieter now, my darling? That's right. Oh, what is it?'

Their uncouth little hostess had come suddenly from behind the curtain, with her pinched, unwashed face working piteously in an attempt to keep back a burst of weeping.

'Oh, will you come to him, ma'am?' she cried. 'He wants you to sing again. He's crying like a baby; and I'll bet man nor woman never saw tears on Morris Edyvean's cheeks before. Oh, come to him, dear lady! You won't hang back from a dying man's prayer?'

As Mary lifted her hand from Ellaline's shoulder, and moved towards the sha-

dowy corner, there was a look on her face which the girl remembered as long as she lived. It was as if a flash of light from within had suddenly shone up and illuminated her features.

‘Morris Edyvean?’ she muttered. ‘Is your husband’s name Edyvean?’

Ellaline waited by the window. She heard Mrs. Smith sing again, and she heard the murmur of voices in conversation, and she waited on, feeling dimly that there was something weird and awesome going on around her.

Mary came out to her after what, in her surprised wonderment, seemed a very long time, and asked her if she would mind going home alone. And if she had felt there was something uncanny in the

march of events before, she felt it a thousand times more so now. Mary was transfigured! Her face was alight and quivering with an intense emotion. Ella-line was very much mystified.

‘Of course she did not mind going home alone, and of course she would send up the basket of food at once. But did her dearest Mrs. Smith think it would be any real good her staying there, in that desolate place? Could they not send somebody up from the town to help the poor woman nurse her husband? Wouldn’t that be a much better plan for all parties?’

But she gave in when she saw how completely Mary’s mind was made up; and took her way home, across the wet, springy turf, and down the steep hill to

the town, in a more hopeless state of bewilderment than ever.

It was very strange and incomprehensible, all of it—in fact it was something a little more, it was mysterious, and Ellaline hated mystery.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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Penhala a wayside wizard



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